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THE saint DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

NOW 35c JAN.

Edited by LESLIE CHARTERIS

It Couldn't Be Murder
by Philip Wylie

Death Goes to the Post
by Brett Halliday

The Man Who Killed Blackbirds
by Sax Rohmer

His Own Petard
by Ben Ames Williams

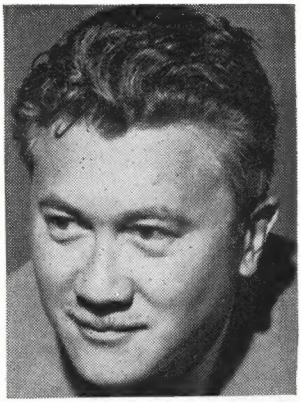
Ghosts of Havana Harbor
by E. Phillips Oppenheim

THE REVOLUTION RACKET

A NEW SAINT STORY by LESLIE CHARTERIS

SOME OLD, SOME NEW — THE FINEST IN MYSTERY FICTION

A KING-SIZE PUBLICATION



IF I tried to kid you that I performed my function as Supervising Editor of this magazine with stern and frigid impartiality, I'm afraid I should be a monumental liar. Half the fun of a job like this is being able to give a friend a break, and I have always been a guy for some fun on the job.

Philip Wylie has been a friend of mine for many years. We even share the same birthday, if the astrologers would like to make something of it. And so naturally, ever since we started, I have been looking forward to a chance of running a story of his in these pages. Fortunately, I need not fear that this gross favoritism will cheat any reader of his due entertainment, for the number of Phil's admirers needs no exaggeration from me. A man of many parts, ranging from his savage classic *Generation of Vipers* to the fantasy of *When Worlds Collide,* which you saw not long ago in Technicolor, and from the futuristic style of *Finnley Wren* to the simple charm of his "Crunch and Des" fishing stories, he brings us here, in *It Couldn't Be Murder,* a complete short novel about a magazine illustrator who helps to solve a mystery—which incidentally may give you an idea why this magazine has no illustrations.

Phil now lives near Miami, Florida, which is also the established bailiwick of Brett Halliday's Michael Shayne. In *Death Goes to the Post,* Shayne solves a homicide which, as the title indicates, is involved with those galloping beetles which keep some of us from becoming rich.

In our first issue, we featured one of Sax Rohmer's Bimbashi Barûk stories. *The Man Who Killed Blackbirds* is another in that series, concerning what may well be the most ruthless hate frame-up ever conceived.

In *His Own Petard,* Ben Ames Williams considers the problem of a reporter who is asked to find the murderer of someone he killed himself. In *Ghosts of Havana Harbor,* E. Phillips Oppenheim contributes one of his famous Peter Ruff adventures in international intrigue.

It strikes me that there is quite a southern touch to this issue, which may be explained by the fact that I've been spending quite a bit of my own time around the Caribbean lately. You guessed it: the Saint is about to start a new series of adventures in the countries and islands around that romantic body of water. In *The Revolution Racket,* my own new contribution, he starts off in Mexico—rather promisingly, I should say.

Join in the fun, fellows.

Leslie Charteris

THE saint DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

JANUARY, 1954
VOL. 1, NO. 5

The Revolution Racket 2
by LESLIE CHARTERIS

It Couldn't Be Murder 29
by PHILIP WYLIE

Death Goes to the Post 80
by BRETT HALLIDAY

His Own Petard 104
by BEN AMES WILLIAMS

The Fool 118
by MILWARD KENNEDY

The Man Who Killed Blackbirds . . . 122
by SAX ROHMER

Hair of His Head 134
by JOHN CREASEY

The High Cost of Dying 140
by EDWIN BAIRD

Ghosts of Havana Harbor 143
by E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM

He Sat Down to Wait 157
by AUGUST DERLETH

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the revolution racket

by . . . Leslie Charteris

The two Mexican cafe gun-runners made their offer a little too good. So Simon cut in, unaware that he too was merely a pawn.

IN MY TIME, I've had all kinds of receptions from the police," Simon Templar remarked. "Sometimes they want to give me a personal escort out of town. Sometimes they see me as a Heaven-sent fall guy for the latest big crime they haven't been able to pin on anybody else. Sometimes they just rumble hideous warnings of what they'll do to me if I get out of line while I'm in their bailiwick. But your approach is certainly out of the ordinary."

"I try not to be an ordinary policeman," said Captain Carlos Xavier.

They sat in the Restaurant Larue, which has become almost as hardworked and undefinitive a name as Ritz among ambitious food purveyors. This one was in Mexico City, but it made a courageous attempt to live up to the glamorous cosmopolitan connotations of its patronymic. There was nothing traditionally Mexican about its décor, which was rather shinily international, and the menu strove to achieve the same expensive neutrality.

However, at Xavier's suggestion, they were eating *pescados blancos,* the delicate little fish of Lake Pátzcuaro which are not quite like anything else in the world, washed down with a bottle

IN HIS NEWEST STORY THE SAINT IS ASKED TO RUIN TWO MEN—BY A COP WHO VOWS TO PUNISH HIM FOR DOING IT.

of Chilean riesling. And this, it had already been established, was at the sole invitation and expense of Captain Carlos Xavier.

"Sometimes," Simon suggested cautiously, "I've actually been asked to help the police with a problem. But the build-up has never been as lavish as this."

"I have nothing to ask, except the pleasure of your company," said Captain Xavier. He was a large fleshy man with a balding head and a compensatingly luxuriant mustache. He ate with gusto and talked with gestures. His small black eyes were humorous and very bright, but even to Simon's critical scrutiny they seemed to beam honesty.

"All my life I must have been reading about you," Xavier said. "Or perhaps I should say, about a person called the Saint. But your identity is no secret now, is it?"

"Hardly."

"And for almost as long, I have hoped that one day I might have the chance to meet you. I am what I suppose you would call a fan."

"Coming from a policeman," said the Saint, "I guess that tops everything."

Xavier shook his head vigorously. "In most countries, perhaps. But not in Mexico."

"Why?"

"This country was created by revolutions. Many of the men who founded it, our heroes, began as little more than bandits. To this very day, the party in power officially calls itself the Revolutionary Party. So, I think, we Mexicans will always have a not-so-secret sympathy in our hearts for the outlaw—what you call the Robin Hood. For although they say you have broken many laws, you have always been the righter of wrongs—is that not true?"

"More or less, I suppose."

"And now that I see you," Xavier went on enthusiastically, and with a total lack of selfconsciousness, "I am even happier. I know that what a man looks like often tells nothing of what he really is. But you are exactly as I had pictured you—tall and strong and handsome, and with the air of a pirate! It is wonderful just to be looking at you!"

The Saint modestly averted his eyes.

This was especially easy to do because the shift permitted him to gaze again at a woman who sat alone at a table across the room. He had noticed her as soon as she entered, and had been glancing at her as often as he could without seeming too inattentive to his host.

With her fair coloring and the unobtrusive elegance of her clothes, she was obviously an American. She was still stretching out her first cocktail, and referring occasionally to the plain gold watch on her wrist. She was, of course, waiting for somebody. The wedding ring on her left hand suggested that it was probably a

husband—no lover worthy of her time would be likely to keep such a delectable dish waiting.

But, there was no harm in considering; married women did travel alone, and sometimes wait for female friends. They also came to Mexico to divorce husbands—and, as a matter of final realism, an attractive woman wearing a wedding ring abroad was not necessarily even married at all, but might wear it just as a kind of flimsy chastity belt, in the hope of discouraging a certain percentage of unwanted Casanovas. The chances were tenuous enough, but an incorrigible optimist like the Saint could always dream. . . .

"And now," Xavier was saying, "tell me what you are going to do in Mexico."

Simon brought his eyes and his ideas back reluctantly. "I'm just a tourist." He had said it so often, in so many places, that it was getting to be like a recitation. "I'm not planning to make any trouble, or get into any. I want to see that new sensation, El Loco, fight bulls. And I'll probably go to Cuernavaca, and Oaxaca, and try the fishing at Acapulco. Just like all the other *gringos.*"

"That is almost disappointing."

"It ought to make you happy."

"It is not very exciting, being a policeman here. I should have enjoyed matching wits with you. Of course, in the end I should catch you, but for a time it would be interesting."

"Of course," Simon agreed politely.

"It would have been a great privilege to observe you in action," Xavier said. "I have always been an admirer of your methods. Besides, before I caught you, you might even have done some good."

The Saint raised his eyebrows. "With anyone as efficient as you on the job, there can't be much left to do."

"I do my best. But unfortunately, when I make an arrest, I have not always accomplished much."

"You mean the court doesn't always take it from there?"

"Much too often."

"Your candor keeps taking my breath away."

Xavier shrugged. "It is the truth. It is not exactly a rare complaint, even in your country. And absolute justice is a much younger idea here. We are still inclined to accept graft as the prerogative of those in power; perhaps it is the legacy of our bandit tradition. It will change, some day. But at the present, there are many times when I would personally like to see a man like you taking the law into his own hands. You will have coffee? And liqueur?"

He snapped his fingers at a waiter and gave the order—and the Saint lighted a cigarette and stole another glance at the honey-blonde young woman across the room. She was still alone, and looking a good deal more im-

patient. It would not be much longer before the moment became most propitious for venturing a move—if he were only alone himself. The thought made an irksome subtraction from his full enjoyment of the fact that a police officer was not only buying his dinner but seemed to be handing him an open invitation to resume his career of outlawry.

With a slight effort, he turned again to the more uncommon of the two attractions. "Are you really wishing I'd un-reform myself," he asked curiously, "or are you just dissatisfied with the Government? Maybe another revolution would produce a better system."

"By no means," Xavier said quickly. Then, as the Saint's blue eyes continued to rest on him levelly, he received their unspoken question and said, "No, I do not say that because I am forced to. The change must come with time and education and growing up. I believe that the government we have today is as good as any other we would get. No, it is better. In fact, it is already too honest for the people who are most anxious to change it. There is only one party which could seriously threaten a revolution today—and who are its sponsors?"

"You mean José Jalisco?"

"A figurehead—an orator who blows hot air whenever the most pesos tell him! I mean the men behind Jalisco."

"Who are they?" Simon asked.

"The Enriquez brothers. But I do not suppose your newspapers have room for our scandals. For many years they were making millions, at the expense of the Mexican people, out of Government construction contracts. It was our new President who ordered the investigation which exposed them, and who threw out the officials who helped them. Even now, they may face imprisonment and fines that would ruin them. They are the ones who would like to see a revolution for Jalisco. They are sitting opposite you now, at the table next to the young woman you have been staring at for the last hour."

Simon winced very slightly, and looked carefully past the blonde.

He had noticed the two men before, observing that they also had been watching the girl and obviously discussing her assets and potentialities. But he had not paid them much attention beyond that. As competition for her favor, he figured that they would not have given him too much trouble. They were excessively well groomed and tailored and manicured, with ostentatious jewelry in their neckties and on their fingers—but their pock-marked features had a cruel and wilful cast that would hardly appeal to a nice girl at first sight. Now that Xavier had identified them, the family resemblance was evident.

"The bigger one is Manuel," Xavier said. "The smaller is

Pablo. But one is as bad as the other. To protect their millions, and to make more, they would not care how many suffered."

Waiters poured coffee and brought brandy, and Simon took advantage of the diversion to study the Enriquez brothers again. This also allowed him to keep track of the trim young blonde. And this time, since he was not looking directly at her, he was able to see that she was looking at him with what seemed to be considerable interest. It was an effort for him to suppress a growing feeling of frustration.

"Do you seriously believe they could start a revolution?" he asked Xavier.

"I know they have talked of it. Jalisco has a large following. He has the gift, which Hitler and Mussolini had, of inflaming mobs. But a mob today can do nothing without modern weapons. That is where the Enriquez brothers come in. They have the money to provide them. One day, I think, they will try to do that. They could be plotting it now, even while we look at them."

"For a couple of desperate conspirators," Simon commented, "they don't seem very embarrassed to have you watching them."

Xavier laughed till his mustache quivered and his second chin shook. But when he could speak again, his voice was as discreetly pitched as it had been all along.

"Me? They have no idea who I am, any more than you would have known if I had not introduced myself at your hotel. Who knows an insignificant captain of the police? They deal with chiefs —if they can. They are too big to care whether I exist. But I know about them, as I knew about you, because it is my business to know."

"And yet there isn't a thing you can do."

"It takes much proof to accuse such important men. And the bigger they are, the harder it is to get. Probably before I ever do it will be too late. Another civil war will not be good for Mexico. But I cannot stop a flood, like the Dutch boy, with my little finger." Xavier shrugged heavily. "That is why I can be sorry the Saint has become so respectable."

The Saint gazed at him with an assemblage of conflicting reactions that added up to a poker-faced blankness which could hardly have been improved on deliberately. But before Simon could decide which of a dozen possible replies to make, a waiter bustled up to Xavier with a folded slip of paper on a tray.

Xavier opened it, frowned at it, and pursed his lips over it for several seconds.

"This is a tragedy," he announced at length, and tucked the note into his pocket.

"Has the shooting started already?" Simon inquired.

"Oh, no. Merely a simple robbery. But it is at the house of a politician, so I must give it my

personal attention. My lieutenant is downstairs and I must go with him."

Xavier stood up, but put out a restraining hand as the Saint started to rise with him.

"No, please stay here. It is only a routine matter and would not interest you. Take time to finish your Benedictine. And have another. I will pay the bill as I go out. I insist." The bright black eyes twinkled. "And perhaps after all you will be able to meet the young lady. I shall call you at your hotel soon. *Hasta luego!*"

And with an effusive sequence of handshakes that kept time with the somewhat frantic deluge of his parting speech, he was gone.

Simon Templar sat down again, feeling a trifle breathless by contagion, and poured himself another cup of coffee.

Not too hurriedly, he looked at the lonely young blonde again.

He was just in time to see her greeting a shmoe who had to be her husband.

II

Well, that was the way life was, Simon reflected, as he chain-lit another cigarette. You could spend weeks waiting for a little gentle excitement—and then, when things started happening, there were more of them than you could handle.

A police captain, of all people, points out a couple of apparently ideal candidates for free-lance euthanasia, gives you the why and wherefore, and practically invites you to go ahead and take a crack at them—adding the almost irresistible bait that, although he will thoroughly approve of whatever you do, he is also sure he will be able to pinch you for it afterwards. But you can't really give your all to this sublime proposition, because you are wishing half the time that he would go away so that you could concentrate on an equally inviting but entirely different temptation.

So finally he does go away, but only after staying just long enough for the other attraction to slip out of reach.

Then you gripe because you've got only one thing left, and you wanted both—quite forgetting that you started the evening with nothing.

Oh, what the hell, the Saint thought. He could still murder the Enriquez brothers. And maybe he should murder the blonde's husband too.

There was no doubt about their marital status. The man was far too typical a hard-driving Babbitt to be any girl's secret romance. A good husband, perhaps, but too busy to be a Lothario. He was still in his forties and not unprepossessing, with a square jaw and horn-rimmed glasses and distinguished flecks of gray at his temples. But you could see that he never left business behind, even bringing a bulging briefcase with him to dinner.

"Whatever kept you so long?"

the blonde asked—not anxiously, not pettishly, but with the controlled and privileged edginess of a longsuffering wife.

"My taxi had a little fender scrape, and it had to be with a police car. You never saw so much commotion and red tape. I almost got locked up as a material witness. I'm sorry, dear—it wasn't my fault."

He turned to the waiter and ordered two Martinis. The Enriquez brothers looked disappointed but went on watching them with a kind of morbid curiosity.

"Well," she said graciously, but after a suitable pause, "what's the news?"

"I'm getting nowhere. I tell you, Doris, I'm about ready to give up and go home."

"That isn't like you, Sherm."

"I know when I'm licked. I've always heard there was a trick to doing business with these South American governments. Now I can vouch for it. You've just got to know the right people—and I *don't* know them. That seems to be the end of it."

The Saint was not making any effort to eavesdrop, but he didn't have to. The restaurant was quiet, and they were talking in clear normal voices, as if they were confident in the security of speaking a foreign language; but that very contrast made it easier for him to separate their conversation from the background tones of Spanish.

The waiter brought him another snifter of B & B, with the parting compliments of Captain Xavier, and went on to deliver two Martinis across the room. Simon gazed innocently into space and let his ears receive what came to them.

"What an incredible hard-luck story it is," the husband said glumly. "First I get a contract to supply all those rifles and machine-guns to Iran—over the heads of all the big arms companies. Then I pull all the strings in Washington to get an export permit, which everyone said couldn't be done. Then I manage to charter a boat to carry them, which isn't so easy these days. And then, two days after the boat sails, they have a revolution in Iran and the new government cancels the order!"

"And you've paid for the guns, haven't you? Your money's tied up."

"It sure is. But I wasn't worried until now. I'd gotten them legally out of the States, so I could still sell them anywhere in the world where I could find a buyer. And I thought Mexico would be a cinch. Their army equipment is nearly all out of date anyhow. And yet I can't even get to talk to anyone. I've got fifty thousand late-model rifles and five thousand machine-guns cruising around the Caribbean, with five million rounds of ammunition—and nobody seems to want 'em!"

It should be recorded as a major testimonial to Simon Temp-

lar's phenomenal self-control that for an appreciable time he did not move a muscle. But he felt as unreal as if he were sitting still in the midst of an earthquake. It required a conscious adjustment for him to realize that the seismic shock he experienced was purely subjective, that the mutter of other voices around had not changed key or missed a beat, that the ceiling had not fallen in and all the glassware shattered in one cataclysmic crash.

"It's not your fault, Sherm," the wife was saying. "You'll just have to try somewhere else. There are plenty of other countries, and I've always wanted to see them."

"I don't know what'd make it better anywhere else. I guess I don't know the right way to approach these people."

It began to dawn on the Saint that his continued immobility could eventually become as conspicuous, to a watchful eye, as if he had jumped out of his skin.

With infinite casualness, he tapped a length of ash from his cigarette, and inhaled with heroic moderation. Then he lifted his B & B and let his eyes wander across the room.

The Enriquez brothers were watching the American couple too, and their expressions made Simon think of a couple of Walt Disney wolves discovering a hole in the fence of a sheep corral.

"For two cents," said the husband morosely, "I'd start looking around for someone who wants to organize a revolution here, and offer to sell *him* the guns. It might do me a lot more good."

Manuel Enriquez spoke earnestly to Pablo, and Pablo nodded vehemently. Then Manuel stood up and approached the adjacent table.

"Please excuse me," he said in good English, "but I could not help hearing what you were saying."

The couple exchanged guilty glances, but Manuel smiled reassuringly. "I appreciate your problem. As you said, it is important to know the right people. I believe my brother and I could help you."

"That sounds wonderful!" said the husband. "Are you serious?"

"Absolutely. May I introduce myself? I am Manuel Enriquez. That is my brother Pablo."

"Sherman Inkler," said the husband, whipping out a wallet and a card from the wallet. "And, of course, this is Mrs. Inkler."

"Oh, Sherm!" Doris Inkler gasped. "This could be the break you've been waiting for!"

"We can soon find out," Manuel said. "But this is not a good place to discuss business. You have not yet ordered your dinner. May I invite you to another place where we can talk more privately? My car is outside, and you shall be my guests."

As the Inklers and Pablo stood up simultaneously, he waved imperiously to the head waiter and shepherded them toward the stairs,

pausing only to take both checks and sign them on the way out. It was during that brief stoppage that the blonde turned and looked at the Saint again, so intently that he knew something had clicked in her memory, that she knew who he was.

The implications of her long, deliberate look would have sprinkled goose-pimples up his spine—if there had been room for any more. But he had just so much capacity for horripilation and all of it had already been preempted by the scene he had just witnessed. The Saint had long ago conditioned himself to accept unblinkingly coincidences that would have staggered anyone less accustomed to them. It was much the same as a prizefighter becoming inured to punishment, except that it was more pleasant.

He had come to regard them as no more than the recurrent evidence of his unique and blessed destiny, which had ordained that wherever he turned, whether he sought it or not, he must always collide with adventure. But the supernatural precision and consecutiveness with which everything had unfolded that evening would have been enough to send spooky tingles up a totem pole.

And yet the immediate result was to leave him sitting as impotently apart as the spectator of a play when the first-act curtain comes down. With the departure of the Enriquez brothers and the Inklers, he was as effectively cut off from the action as if it were unrolling in another world. His instinctive impulse, of course, was to follow—but cold reason instantaneously knocked that on the head.

Manuel Enriquez had said they would go to a place where they could talk privately, and the Saint felt sure it would be just that. If any of them saw him again in their vicinity, it was a ten-to-one bet they would remember him from the restaurant anyway and draw the obvious conclusion. And that last long look from the blonde had taken it out of the realm of risk into the confines of stark certainty.

He tried to analyze that look again in retrospect, to determine what else might have been in it beyond simple recognition, while another department of his mind reached for philosophical consolation for the quirk of circumstance that kept him pinned to his chair.

Why did he have to follow, anyhow? He could predict exactly what would happen next. The Enriquez brothers would offer to buy the shipload of guns. And Sherman Inkler, of course, would have his price.

He finished his drink and coffee and stood up at last, and went down the stairs and through the bar out to the Paseo de la Reforma. It was raining, as it can in Mexico City even in late spring, and the moist air had an exotic aroma of overloaded drains. One

day, they say, the whole city will sink back and disappear into the swampy depths of the crater from which it arose. On such nights, as in any other city, there is always a dearth of taxis, but the Saint was fortunate enough to meet one unloading customers for the motion picture theater next door.

He had had plans to go prowling in search of distraction later that evening when he got rid of Xavier, but now the drive had evaporated. Opportunity had already knocked as often as it was likely to in one night.

III

The Comee is not the plushest hotel in Mexico City, being a few minutes' drive from the fashionable center of town. But its entirely relative remoteness makes it quieter than the more publicized caravanserais, and the Saint preferred it for that reason.

He sat on his bed and turned the pages of the telephone directory.

Would Carlos Xavier have an unlisted number? But Xavier was sure to be still tied up with a burgled politico, in any case. And the Saint was far from obsessed with the idea of talking to Xavier so soon again.

What kind of hotel would the Inklers be staying at? There could only be a limited number of possibilities.

He picked up the telephone. "The Reforma Hotel, please," he said.

After the usual routine of sound effects, the connection was made. "Mr. Inkler, please," he said. "Mr. Sherman Inkler."

"One moment, please."

It was longer than that. Then the Reforma operator said, "I'm sorry, there is no Mr. Inkler here."

"Thank you," said the Saint.

He lighted a cigarette and stretched himself out more comfortably on the bed while he jiggled the telephone bracket. This method of search might take some time. But it was bound to succeed eventually. When he got the Comee operator back, he said, "Get me the Del Prado."

He drew another blank there. But all it would take was patience.

He was starting to call his own operator again when there was a knock on the door. He hung up with a frown, and stood up and opened it.

Doris Inkler stood outside.

"You don't have to try any longer, unless you particularly want to," she said. "May I come in?"

The Saint was not given to exaggerated reactions. He did not fall over backwards in an explosion of sparks and stars, like a character in the funny papers, with his eyebrows shooting up through his hair. He may have felt rather like it, but he was able to resist the inclination. In his memoirs, he would probably list it among the finest jobs of resist-

ing he ever did. He managed a grin.

He waved his cigarette with an aplomb that had no counterpart in his internal sensations.

"But of course," he said cordially. "This proves that telepathy is still better than telephones."

She stepped in just as calmly, and he closed the door.

"I could have let you work a lot longer, if I'd wanted to make it tough for you," she said. "But I got tired of standing outside."

Her head and eyes made an indicative movement back and upwards, and he followed their direction to the open transom above the door. He shut it.

"You must have a very big kind heart," he said.

"It's a pretty tedious way to track anyone down," she said. "I know. That's how I located you."

"Did you make a deal or wash out with the Enriquez brothers so quickly?"

"They dropped me off first, and just took Sherman along. I think they have an old-world prejudice against having wives sit in on business conferences. So I was probably able to start calling sooner than you did. Besides, I was lucky."

"Where, as a matter of interest, are you staying?"

"In room six-eleven."

The Saint sighed. "And this is probably the last hotel I'd have tried. It would have seemed too easy. Whereas you, being a direct-minded woman, probably tried it first."

"Correct. But let's change that 'direct-minded' to 'economical.' This was the one place I could try before I started to run up a telephone bill."

He cleared some things from a chair and she sat down. He gave her a cigarette, lighted it, and sat on the edge of the bed. At last he was actually as relaxed and at ease as he had contrived to seem from the beginning. He wondered why he had ever allowed himself to get in a stew about the apparent dead end he had run into. He should have known that such a fantastically pat and promising beginning could not possibly peter out as long as there was such an obviously plot-conscious genius at work. Inevitably the thread would have been brought back to him even if he had done nothing but sit and wait for it.

But underneath his coolly interested repose he was as wary as if he had been closeted with a coy young tigress. Perhaps everything would remain cosy, but he had no illusions about the basic hazards of the situation.

"It's nice to feel that our hearts are so in tune," he remarked. "I was determined to find you again, regardless of cost. You were a little thriftier about it, but no less determined. And so we meet. Fate failed to keep us apart and at this moment is probably gnashing the few teeth it can have left. However, there's still one small point. I had plenty of opportuni-

ties to hear your name. But how did you know mine?"

"I recognized you, Mr. Templar —as I think you knew."

"We haven't met before."

"No."

"So you've seen my picture and read about me."

"Right. And now it's time you let me ask a question. Why were you so anxious to find me?"

"Any mirror would tell you better than I can," Simon said after due consideration. "But let's say that when I first saw you alone, I was hoping you'd stay that way long enough for us to get acquainted. I was sort of tied up at the moment, if you remember. Then, when your husband showed up, I could see you were much too good for him. After thinking it over, I decided that he's the dull type that it's almost a public duty to cuckold. I was planning to find out if you agreed."

Her eyes widened a fraction but did not blink. They were a darker blue than his own, and there were smoky shadows in their depths. Blue is conventionally a cool color, but he realized that her shade could have the heat potential of a blowtorch flame.

"You don't try very hard to be subtle, do you?" she said, without any indignation.

"Not always. Especially when a girl seems to have similar ideas of her own. You didn't track me down just to ask for my autograph, did you?"

"No. My turn again. What do you know about the Enriquez brothers?"

"That they're big tycoons down here, and tough babies. That they've specialized in robbing the Mexican public through Government contracts obtained by graft and corruption. That they were recently investigated and exposed by the present administration, and are temporarily out of business and facing a possible rest period in the hoosegow.

"That they would therefore like to see a fast change in the régime. That they are backing a fast-changer named José Jalisco, who has the necessary wind to rouse the rabble, and would love to buy some toys that go bang for his followers. That this makes them ideal customers for a homeless shipload of arms and ammunition."

"You seem to have found out a great deal."

"It was poured into my ear, on what I believe to be excellent authority. Shouldn't that make it my turn next? Why were you looking for me, if it wasn't just to tell me how wonderful you think I am?"

"I wanted to ask how you felt about that gun deal."

The Saint grinned. "That's a neat reverse," he said appreciatively.

"Well?"

She was not smiling. The dusky warmth in her eyes was stilled and held back, perhaps like a force in reserve.

Simon gazed at her directly for several seconds while he made a decision. He snubbed out his cigarette gently in an ashtray.

"I don't like it," he said.

"Do you really care whether they have another revolution here?"

"Yes, I do," he said. "It may be rather dreamy and sentimental of me, but I care. If I thought it had a chance of doing some good, I might feel differently. But I know about this one. Its only real objective would be to get a couple of top-flight grafters off the hook and put them back in business. To achieve that, a lot of wretched citizens and stooges would be killed and maimed, and thousands more would be made even more miserable than they are. I wouldn't like that."

"Not even if it dropped a very nice piece of change into your own lap?"

His mouth hardened. "Not even if it dropped me the keys to Fort Knox," he said coldly. "I can always steal a few million without killing anyone or making nearly so many people unhappy."

She flicked her cigarette jerkily. The ash made a gray splash on the carpet.

"So if you could, you'd try to stop Sherman from making a deal."

"I'll go further. I intend to do my damnedest to louse it up."

"I had an idea that was what you'd say."

"If you'd read anything about me worth reading, you wouldn't even have had to ask."

She took a slow deep breath. It stirred fascinating contours under the soft silk of her dress.

"That's good," she said. "I just had to be sure. Now I know you'll be with us. We don't have any cargo of guns to sell. We're just trying to clean up in the bunko racket, with a bit of that Robin Hood touch you used to specialize in. The whole pitch was just a build-up to take the Enriquez brothers."

IV

Simon Templar stood up, unfolding his length inch by inch. He felt for the pack of cigarettes in his shirt pocket. He drew out a cigarette and placed it between his lips. He stroked his lighter and put it to the cigarette. He exhaled a thin jet of smoke and put the lighter back in his pocket.

All his movements were extremely slow and careful, as if he were balancing on a tightrope over a whirling void. They had to be, while he waited for his fragmented coordinates to settle down, like a spun kaleidoscope, into a new pattern. But by this time his capacity for dizziness was fortunately a little numbed. The human system can only absorb so many jolts in one evening without losing some of its pristine vigor of response.

"I see," he said. "I suppose I should have guessed it when your husband came bouncing in and

spilled all the beans so loudly and clearly at the very next table to Manuel and Pablo—after you'd kept them watching you long enough to be quite sure they'd be listening."

"He wasn't meant to wait quite so long," she said, "but he did get held up."

"So there is no ship. And no guns."

She shook her head. "There is a ship. It's cruising in the Gulf of Mexico right now. It has a lot of crates on board—full of rocks. There are also two or three on top which do have rifles and machine-guns in them and can be opened for inspection. We weren't expecting the Enriquez brothers to put out a lot of cash without being convinced about what they were buying."

"That sounds like quite an investment."

"It was. But we can afford it. If it works out, we'll pick up at least half a million dollars."

The Saint rubbed his hands softly together, just once.

"A truly noble swindle," he murmured with restrained rapture. "Boldly conceived, ingeniously contrived, unstintingly financed, slickly dramatized, professionally played—and one of the classics of all time for size. I wish I'd thought of it myself."

For the first time in a long while, a trace of a smile touched her lips. "You approve?"

"Especially in the choice of pigeons," said Simon Templar.

"I'm glad of that. I picked them myself, and planned it all for them. I thought it made quite a Saintly set-up. In fact, I should really give you most of the credit. I was thinking of things I'd read about you, and the way you used to do jobs like this, all the time I was figuring it out."

He studied her again, for the first time with purely intellectual appraisal.

"It begins to sound as if you were the brains of the Inkler partnership."

"Sometimes I am. Of course, Sherm wasn't doing so badly when I teamed up with him. But this one was my very own brainchild."

"And was it all your own idea, too, to come and talk to me just now?"

"We agreed on it. I had a chance to get in a word with him alone when they dropped me off. I told him I'd recognized you. We both knew we'd have to do some fresh figuring, and fast. He left it to me. As a matter of fact, he didn't have much choice. The Enriquez brothers were waiting. He said whatever I did was okay with him, but to do *something*."

"Well," said the Saint helpfully, "what are you going to do?"

She raised her eyes to his face. "I've told you the whole story. And I'm hoping you're not sore at me for trying to imitate your act."

"Of course not," Simon assured her heartily. "If you mean for

baiting such a beautiful trap to skin a pair of sidewinders like Manuel and Pablo. I wish a lot more people would take up the sport. However . . ." His brows drew together and his gaze slanted at her shrewdly. "I had my eye on them too, even if you saw them first."

"And you should get a royalty for being my inspiration." She put out her cigarette, escaping his steady scrutiny only for a moment, and looked at him again. "All right. Would you be satisfied if we split three ways?"

"You, me, and Sherman?"

"Yes. After all, we've spent a lot of money and done a lot of groundwork."

Simon walked over to the window and looked out. It seemed to have stopped raining, but the streets below were shiny with water. He gazed over the nearer rooftops and the scattered lights to the hazy glow of illumination that hung over the city's center. He had seldom felt that life was so rich and bountiful.

There may well be among the varied devotees of these chronicles some favored individual who has once experienced a certain feeling of elation upon learning that a hitherto undreamed-of uncle has gone to join the Heavenly choir, leaving him a half-dozen assorted oil wells.

Such a one might have a faint conception of the incandescent beatitude that was welling up in the Saint's ecstatic soul. A very faint and protopathic conception. For the fundamentally dreary mechanics of inheriting a few mere fountains of liquid lucre cannot really be compared with the blissful largesse that the Saint saw Providence decanting on him from its upturned cornucopia. This had poetry—this fell into the kind of artistic pattern that made music in his heart.

He turned at last. "Will you just mail me my share," he asked, "or am I expected to help?"

"Is the deal okay?"

"You must remind me some day to warn you about being too generous in this racket."

She let out breath in an almost inaudible sigh, sinking a little deeper in the chair. It was the first proof she had given that she had been under tension before.

"You could help a lot."

"Tell me."

"Frankly," she said, "the only thing I've been worried about is the payoff. First, they'll want to be sure that we've really got the guns. That's taken care of. They can take a motorboat and go out a few miles from Vera Cruz or Tampico, and meet our boat. All right. Then we'll come to the question of delivery. That cargo can't be unloaded at a regular port. So I expect them to pick some quiet spot along the coast where it can be brought in at dead of night."

"How do you manage to be so beautiful and have this kind of brain?" he asked admiringly.

"I'm only thinking it out the way you would." There was nothing coy about her now. "So we agree to do that. But we can't count on them giving us the money and trusting that we'll deliver. Most probably they'll want to pay off at the landing place, when the cargo starts coming ashore. We'll have to agree to that too. And then suppose they decided to double-cross us—to take the cargo and keep their money?"

"They'd be afraid of you tipping off the cops. But of course, if they were going that far, they could shut you up permanently."

"And Sherman isn't the fighting type. Even if he had a gun he wouldn't know how to use it."

"How about your crew on the boat?"

"They're only half in on the caper. We told them we were trying to run in a batch of illegal slot machines and hired them for a flat price. You can imagine what a cut they'd want if we'd said anything about guns. They don't think they're taking much of a risk, and I'd hate to rely on them in a real jam."

"But you're paying them out of your share?"

"Call it part of the investment I mentioned. That's why I couldn't offer you better than a three-way split. When you work it out, you'll really be getting closer to half of the net."

He nodded.

"I'm afraid my lecture on the folly of being too generous isn't going to do you much good when I get around to it, Doris." The twist of his mouth was humorously speculative. "However, since you made the terms, I guess a little bodyguarding isn't too much help to ask in return for a cut like that."

She stood up from the chair and moved toward him. She kept coming, slowly, until the tips of her breasts touched his chest.

"If that isn't enough," she said softly, "there might be a personal bonus. Sherman won't be back for a long while yet. You've got time to think it over."

Doris Inkler phoned Simon at nine o'clock, as he was stepping out of the shower, and asked him to join them in their suite for breakfast. A few minutes later he knocked on the door, and she opened it. She looked fresh and cool in a light cotton print, and her eyes were only warm and intimate for an instant before she turned to introduce him to her husband.

"Doris has told me the deal," Inkler said, shaking hands in the brisk businesslike way which was so much a part of his act that it must have become a part of himself. "This caper is all her baby, so it's okay with me. Glad to have you on our side."

He looked a little tired and nervous. "I didn't get in till three this morning," he explained. "These Mexicans don't seem to care about bedtime. I guess they

make up for it with their *siestas* in the afternoon. However, everything's set."

A waiter wheeled in a table set with three places.

"We ordered bacon and eggs for you," Inkler said. "Hope that's all right."

"I'm starved," Doris said. "While you were dining and wining with the brothers you politely got rid of me."

"I thought you'd get something here," Inkler said.

"I was too busy locating Mr. Templar. And after that—too busy."

She was pouring coffee as she said it and didn't look at Simon.

"I'm sorry," said the Saint. "I forgot all about that. I was too interested myself."

"The Enriquez boys are calling for us at half-past eleven," Inkler said. "By that time they'll have arranged for the cash. They'll drive us to Vera Cruz. They've got a fishing boat there, and we'll go out and look at the cargo. I sent a radiogram to our captain last night, telling him to meet us twenty miles out. I just hope it isn't too rough."

"How are you going to account for me?" Simon asked.

"That's easy," Doris said. "You're Sherman's partner, just arrived from the States. You were worried about his making no progress and flew down unexpectedly to see whether you could help."

"Your faith in me is almost embarrassing. How did you know I'd have the equipment to disguise myself, in case one of the brothers happened to remember seeing me at another table last night?"

"If you hadn't, we could have lent it to you. But I couldn't imagine the Saint being without all necessary equipment for his profession. I expect you have another name with you too."

"Tombs," said the Saint. "Sebastian Tombs."

He still had a sentimental attachment to the absurd alias that he had used so often but felt reasonably confident that the Enriquez brothers would not have heard of it.

"Have you got a gun?" Inkler asked.

Simon patted his left side, under the arm. "I can take care of Manuel and Pablo, and maybe some of their friends, if they try any funny business," he said. "But whether I can take care of the whole Mexican gendarmerie is another matter.

"Even if everything goes according to plan it may not be long before they find out your packing cases aren't all full of artillery. Then they might have the cops looking for us on some phony charge—as well as Jalisco's bully boys. I don't think Mexico will be the ideal vacation spot for us after this. What did your plans call for after you got the dough?"

Inkler looked at his wife, leaving her to answer.

"There's a night plane from

here to Havana that stops at Vera Cruz at two o'clock in the morning," she said. "It should be just right for us. I'll make the reservations while you're getting disguised, if that suits you."

The Saint seldom used an elaborate disguise, and in this case he did not have to conceal his identity from anyone who knew him but only from two men who might possibly recall him from having noticed him casually the night before. With plenty of gray combed into his dark hair, and the addition of a neat mustache and tinted glasses, he was sure that the Enriquez brothers would see nothing familiar about him. Even the Inklers, when he first met them again, looked at him blankly.

The Enriquez brothers arrived with un-Mexican punctuality. Simon was introduced to them in the lobby, and they accepted Inkler's explanation of his presence with no signs of suspicion.

Outside, they had two matching light yellow Cadillacs. Chauffeurs opened the doors simultaneously as they came out. Manuel Enriquez ushered them into one of the cars; and Simon, always considerate of his own comfort on a long trip, quietly slipped into the front seat. Manuel followed the Inklers into the back. Pablo waved to them and turned away.

"He goes in the other car," Manuel explained. "He has the money." He said it with a smile, almost passing it off as a joke, so that the implication was inoffensive. But it left no doubt, if there had ever been any, that the Enriquez brothers were not babes in the woods. Nor, Simon believed, were their chauffeurs. The one beside him, whom he was able to study, had the shoulders of a prizefighter and a face that had not led a sheltered life.

On the other hand, these evidences of sensible caution did not necessarily mean a double-cross in prospect, and the Saint saw no reason why he should not enjoy the trip. Manuel was a good host in his way, even if he made Simon think of a hospitable alligator, making agreeable small talk about Mexican customs and conditions without reference to politics. Nor was there any mention of the object of their journey.

They had lunch at Puebla, and then rolled on down the long serpentine road to the coast. After awhile the Saint went to sleep.

It was early evening when they reached Vera Cruz, and drove through the hot noisy streets out to the comparative tranquillity of the Mocambo.

"We will stay here tonight," Manuel said. "While they take in our bags we will get something to eat. It may be late before we can have dinner."

After sandwiches and cold beer they got into Manuel's car again. A short drive took them to the Club Nautico. As they got out, Simon observed that Pablo's

Cadillac was no longer behind them.

"If all is well, we shall meet him presently," Manuel said.

He guided them to the dock where a shiny new Chris-Craft with fishing chairs and outriggers was tied up. The crew of two who helped them aboard were identical in type with the chauffeurs, and no less efficiently taciturn. The lines were cast off at once and the big engines came to life, one after the other, with deep hollow roars. The boat idled out into the darkening harbor.

"Tell us where we are to go," Manuel said.

"Northeast," Inkler said, "and twenty miles out."

Enriquez translated to the captain at the wheel. "Let us go inside and be comfortable," he said. "I have whiskey, gin, and tequila. In an hour we should be able to see your boat."

V

The time did not pass too badly, although Simon would have preferred to stay on deck. It was noisy in the cabin, with the steady drone of the engines and the rush of water, so that a certain effort had to be made to talk or listen. But fortunately for their comfort there was very little sea, and the speeding boat did not bounce much.

He was checking his watch for the exact end of the estimated hour when the engines suddenly reduced their volume of sound and the boat sagged down off the step and surged heavily as its own wake overtook it. They went out into the after cockpit, and Simon saw the lights and silhouette of a ship dead ahead.

A moment later, Enriquez switched on a spotlight and sent its beam sweeping over the other vessel. It was a squat and very dilapidated little coastal freighter of scarcely three hundred tons, which would certainly have looked like having a rough voyage to Iran if anybody but the Saint had been critical of such details at that moment. An answering light blinked from her bridge, three times.

"That's it," Inkler said.

"What you call, on the nose?" Enriquez said with solid satisfaction.

As the Chris-Craft drew alongside, the freighter lowered a boarding ladder. Doris Inkler stood beside the Saint.

"We'll wait for you here," she said.

They watched Inkler and Enriquez clamber up the ladder and disappear. Simon lighted two cigarettes and gave her one. She stayed close to him, watching the Mexican captain and mate as they made a rope fast to the ladder and hung fenders over the rubbing strake.

"This is the first place we could have trouble," she said in a low voice. "If Manuel wants one of the wrong cases opened. . . ."

"Don't worry until it happens," he said.

But he could feel her tenseness, and he was a little tense himself for what seemed like an interminable time, which by his watch was less than a half-hour, until at last Inkler and Enriquez came down the ladder and joined them in the smaller boat's cockpit. Then he could tell by the subtly different confidence of both men that there had been no trouble.

Manuel spoke briefly to the captain, who yelled at the mate, and the bow line was cast off. Water widened between the two hulls and the Chris-Craft engines grumbled again. Manuel shepherded the Inklers and the Saint below.

He poured four drinks in four clean glasses, and raised one of them. "To our good fortunes," he said.

"Is everything all right?" Doris asked, holding onto her glass.

"Your husband is a good businessman. He has the right things for the right customers."

Only the most captious analyst might have thought she was a fraction slow with her response.

"Oh, Sherman!" Doris flung her arms around Inkler's neck and kissed him joyously. Then she turned to the Saint and did the same to him. Inkler watched this with a steady smile.

"Your boat is now following us to a little fishing village where I have men waiting to unload the cargo," Manuel said.

"Is it far?" Sherm Inkler asked.

"We have to go slower, of course. But it will not be too long. About three hours. And we have plenty to drink."

"Pablo Enriquez is waiting there with the money," Inkler said to the Saint.

Simon remembered that he had the privileged role of a partner.

"Exactly when is it to be paid?" he inquired. "I hope Mr. Enriquez won't be offended, but business is business. He wanted to see what we had to offer before he committed himself, and quite rightly. Now I don't think we should have to unload our cargo until it's paid for."

Manuel grinned like a genial saurian. "As soon as I tell Pablo it's okay, he gives you the money. Five hundred thousand American dollars. In cash!"

There was nothing more to be said. But the rest of the voyage seemed to take more than three times as long as the trip out. The Chris-Craft wallowed along sluggishly, rolling a little with the swell. They all realized that her speed had to be cut down to let the freighter keep up with her, but still their nerves chafed against the restraint, aching impatiently and impossibly for the throttles to open and the ship to lighten and lift up and skim with all the throbbing speed of which she was capable, lancing through the time between them and the climax ahead. That was how Simon felt, and he knew that two others felt

exactly as he did—and worse.

There was plenty to drink, as Manuel said, but they could not even take advantage of that to deaden the consciousness of crawling minutes. Sipping lightly and at a studiously sober pace himself, Simon noted that the Inklers were doing the same. Once Sherman emptied his glass rather hurriedly, and earned an unmistakable cold stare from his wife. After that he left the refill untouched for a long time. Only Enriquez was under no inhibition, but the alcohol seemed to have no effect on him, unless it were to confirm his hard-lipped good humor.

"Perhaps one day we do some more business, but in the open," was the closest he came to referring to the lawless purpose of their association. "It is like Prohibition in your country, is it not? When the law changes, the bootleggers become importers. But until then, it is better you forget all about tonight."

Watching him with ruthless detachment, the Saint was unable to detect any foreshadowing of a double-cross. And after all, it was entirely possible that the Enriquez brothers would be prepared to pay for what they thought they were getting, might even consider it cheap at the price. At the end of three infinite hours he was almost convinced that Manuel was prepared to complete his bargain. Yet he could not relax.

At last, after three eternities, there was a change of volume in the purr of the engines, and the boat seemed to be rolling less, and muffled voices shouted on deck. Manuel put down his glass and went out quickly. They followed.

The night air was still warm and humid, but it was refreshing after the stuffy cabin. The sky overhead was an awning of rich velvet sprinkled with brilliant stars, and on both sides Simon saw the black profiles of land. Over the bow, at the end of the bay, he saw the scattered yellow window lights of a small village, and closer there were other lights down by the water, flashlights that moved and danced. Searching around for the ugly shape of the little freighter, he found it looming so close astern that it was momentarily alarming, until he realized that it was hardly moving. The Mexican captain was yelling up at it and waving his arms.

Enriquez took over, translating, "Stop here! You can't go any farther!"

The anchor came down from the freighter with a clanking of chain and a splash. Enriquez turned to Inkler. "We can go in to the dock, but he is too big. My men will come out in smaller boats to unload."

Inkler relayed the information, shouting upwards at the freighter's bridge. He added, "Don't let them have the stuff till I give the signal "

A voice shouted back, unnautically, "Okey-doke."

The Mexican captain shoved

the clutches forward, and the Chris-Craft purred away

In a few minutes they were alongside the ramshackle dock where the flashlights bobbed. There were at least a dozen men on it, along with a slight aroma of fish and sweat and garlic. The silent shadowy figures gave an impression of roughness and toughness, but only an occasional glimpse of detail could be seen when a light moved. Manuel stepped ashore first, and the Saint followed him and gave his hand to Doris Inkler to help her. Her hand was cold, and she kept hold of his even after she had joined him on the rickety timbers. Sherman Inkler stumbled onto the pier after them.

Enriquez seemed to sense the defensiveness of their grouping, for he said reassuringly, "They are all friends of our friend Jalisco. Don't worry. This village is one of ours."

He guided them through the opening ranks and off the dock. It felt good to the Saint to stretch his legs again on solid ground. The dim square outlines of several parked trucks loomed around them. Then there was another man, whose face was faintly spotlighted in the darkness by the glow of a cigar. It was Pablo.

The two brothers talked quickly and briefly in Spanish, and Manuel said mostly, *"Si, si,"* and *"Está bien."*

"This way," Pablo said.

He led them a little distance from the trucks, to where one of the yellow Cadillacs was parked under a tree with one of the burly chauffeurs beside it. He went around to the back and unlocked the trunk. An automatic light went on as it opened, illuminating one medium-sized suitcase inside.

"That is for you," Pablo said.

Inkler stepped slowly forward. He opened the suitcase gingerly, as if half expecting it to be booby-trapped. Simon felt Doris tremble a little at his shoulder. Then they saw the neat bundles of green bills that filled the bag.

"You may count it," Manuel said.

Inkler took out one of the packages of currency and thumbed through it methodically. He compared it with the others for thickness. Doris joined him and began to count packages, rummaging to the very bottom of the bag. Sherman pulled out occasional bills and examined them very closely under the light. Most of them were twenties and fifties.

Simon Templar watched from where he stood, and also let his eyes travel all around and turned his head casually to look behind him. His muscles and reflexes were poised on a hair-trigger. But he could neither see nor hear any hint of a closing ambush. The husky chauffeur stood a little apart, like a statue. The Enriquez brothers talked together in low tones, and the only scraps of their conversation that the Saint could catch were concerned entirely with

their arrangements for storing and distributing the ordnance that they thought they were buying.

"I'm satisfied," Sherman Inkler said at last.

Manuel lighted a cigar. "Good. Then you will give the signal to your boat?"

"Of course."

Manuel led him back into the gloom, in the direction of the pier. Doris Inkler closed and fastened the suitcase and pulled it out of the car trunk. She went off-balance a little as the full weight came on her arm, and she put it down on the ground.

"It's heavy," she said with a nervous laugh. And as the Saint stepped up to feel it, out of curiosity, she added, "Give me a cigarette."

He gave her one, and Pablo lighted it. "It is a lot of money," Pablo said. "It will buy many pretty things, if you have an appreciative husband."

"I'll feel safer with it when it's turned into traveler's checks," said the Saint.

Pablo laughed.

They made forced and trivial conversation until Simon heard Manuel and Sherman returning.

Now, if there were to be any treachery on the part of the Enriquez brothers, it would have to show itself. The Saint's weight was on the balls of his feet, his right hand ready to move like a striking snake. But still the movement for which he was waiting did not come.

"I am afraid it will take several hours to unload everything," Manuel said. "Would you like to go back to the boat and have some more drinks?"

Doris looked at her husband. "Can't we return to the hotel? I'm tired, and famished—and the mosquitoes are eating me alive."

"Pablo and I must stay here," Manuel said. "And we need all our men. Even the chauffeur should be helping. However—would you like to take the car? One of you can drive. It is an easy road to Vera Cruz. You cannot get lost."

He gave directions.

"But what about you?" Inkler protested half-heartedly.

"We will come later, on one of the trucks. Do not wait up for us."

Almost incredulously, they found themselves getting into the Cadillac. Sherman picked up the suitcase full of money and put it in the front seat, and got in beside it, behind the wheel. "Don't want to let it out of my sight," he said with an empty grin. Manuel and Pablo kissed the hand of Doris, and she got in the back. Simon shook hands with them and got in after her. In a matter of seconds they were on their way.

They must have driven more than a mile in silence. It was as if they were afraid that even there the Enriquez brothers might overhear them, that a careless word might shatter a fragile spell. . . .

And then suddenly, uncon-

trollably, Doris electrified the stillness with a wild banshee shriek. "We did it!" she screamed. "We've got the money, and we're off. *We did it!*"

"Better than I ever hoped for," Sherman said shakily. "I thought at the very least we'd have a chauffeur to get rid of. But we're on our own already. Now pull yourself together!"

Doris fell back, giggling hysterically.

The Saint's right hand slid unobtrusively under his coat, fingered the butt of the holstered automatic. Then it moved to the pocket where he kept his cigarettes.

"So you didn't really need me," he said. "The Enriquez brothers were on the level, after their fashion. They may swindle the Government and send peasants out to kill and be killed for them, but they pay their bills. I guess there *is* honor among certain kinds of thieves."

Doris stopped squirming and sat up with a final cathartic gasp.

"Oh, no," she said. "I'm glad we ran into you. Terribly glad."

And suddenly her lips were on his, hot and hungry, and her body against him, and her arms winding around him, groping. And then, just as quickly, she tore herself away, back to the far side of the seat; and he looked down and saw the gleam of his gun in her hand, pointing at him.

"You didn't have to use it," she said, a little breathlessly. "But I will if you try anything. Pull over, Sherm. I've got him covered."

VI

The Saint didn't move. He gazed at her steadily, and rather sadly, while the car lost speed without any abruptness that might have spoiled her aim.

"A perfect stranger," he said, "a person who didn't know your sweet loyal soul, would think you were going to take a mean advantage of me—to toss me aside like an old squeezed-out toothpaste tube."

"A perfect stranger would be right," she said. "It was mighty nice to have you with us while there was a real chance the Enriquez brothers might have been planning to pull a fast one. But now we're out of that danger, you're too expensive a partner. However, you can still be useful. I figure that if we leave you for them or the cops to catch, when they find out who you are they won't care so much about trying to find us."

"That's how I thought you had it figured."

She peered at him sharply, then gave a short grating laugh. "You did?"

The car had stopped now, and Inkler turned around in the front seat. "Don't let's waste any more time, Doris."

"Hold it, Sherm. This I have got to hear!"

"You remember the lecture I

promised you about your extravagant generosity, darling?" said the Saint. "That was the tip-off. When you came and offered me a third of a prize like this, after you'd done all the groundwork, and with you and Sherman paying all the expenses out of your end, you overplayed it to a fare-thee-well. They just don't make fairy godparents like that in the racket.

"If you'd offered me about twenty grand, say, just to keep my mouth shut and do this little walk-on in the last act, I might have fallen for it. But more than a hundred and sixty thousand, free and clear—that just had to be sucker-bait."

"Then why did you go for it?"

"I had to see how it would work out. And there was always an outside chance that you might be just a little crazy. But if you were a thoroughly bad girl—if you really were trying to pull something like this on the old maestro—then I'd have to teach you a lesson."

"I'll look forward to that," she said.

She fumbled behind her and opened the door on her side. She got out without turning away from him, and held the door open, still keeping him covered. At the same time, Sherman got out on his side.

"Come on outside, Saint," she said.

"That's a fighting phrase," Simon remarked mildly.

But he followed her, and she made him step a little away from the car. She handled the gun like a professional, and kept a safe distance from a sudden leap.

He gave her a last chance. "You seemed rather to like me last night, if I may be so ungentlemanly as to mention it," he said. "Why don't we ditch your husband instead, and start a new team?"

She shook her head. "Not my husband. My brother. We only work as husband and wife because it makes a better act. I like you a lot, Saint, but you just aren't in the running."

"I'm sorry," he said.

He caught the flicker of her eyes and the almost imperceptible whisper of movement behind him at the same instant, and spun around. He saw Sherman Inkler with something like a blackjack in his right hand, raised and already falling, and stepped in under it like a cat. The Saint's left came up under the man's chin with a snap like a collision of pool balls, and Sherman was probably already unconscious before the right cross that followed the uppercut slammed him against the car and dropped him at the enforced limit of his horizontal travel.

The Saint turned. And quite deliberately, Doris Inkler shot at him. He heard the click of the firing pin, but that was all.

Then he took the gun from her hand.

"You shouldn't have done that," he said. "It deprives you of your last hope of sympathy. You'd have killed me if I hadn't been careful." He was doing something to the gun and putting it back in his shoulder holster. "You knew where I had my gun, and I knew the first thing you'd do would be to take it. So I took out the magazine while we were driving," he explained calmly.

She spat obscenities and flew at him with her fingernails, so that he had to clip her on the jaw with a loose fist, just hard enough to knock her cold for a few seconds, rather than have his last remaining pleasant memories of her ruined.

He took the airplane tickets, but left them some money and their tourist cards, without which they would have found it very complicated indeed to cross any Mexican border. He felt that was pretty Saintly, considering what they would have done to him, but that would always be his weakness. Even so, their chances would be none too good.

He got into the Cadillac and drove on.

At the outskirts of Vera Cruz he stopped long enough to peel off his mustache and rub the gray out of his hair with a handkerchief. He put the tinted glasses in his pocket. Then he drove on again, slowly, until he found himself within a couple of blocks of bright lights.

He parked the car in a dark yard, took out the suitcase of loot, and walked on. In a little while he found a taxi, and ordered the driver to take him to the airport. He saw no need to risk going back to the Mocambo for his overnight bag. With what he carried in his hand he could cheerfully consider everything it contained expendable. His watch told him he had just a comfortable margin of time to catch the plane.

He checked in at the ticket counter, but kept possession of the suitcase. It was a little larger than the size passengers are normally permitted to carry with them, but the clerk was sleepy and let him get away with it. He was passed on to another official, who stamped his tourist card.

Then a hand fell on his shoulder. "You are leaving us so soon?" said Captain Carlos Xavier.

He took the Saint's arm and led him past the customs counter, under the eyes of the uniformed officer, through a door marked *Entrada prohibida,* and into a small shabby office. He shut the door, and pointed to the Saint's suitcase.

"You will let me look in it, please?"

Simon laid the bag on the desk and released the locks, but he did not open it. He stepped back and let Xavier raise the lid. He unbuttoned his coat and was glad he had reloaded his gun.

Xavier stared at the money for a long time. "I suppose this belongs to the Enriquez brothers?"

"It did," Simon replied steadily. "But they paid it over quite voluntarily, for what they thought was a shipment of arms and ammunition for Jalisco's revolution."

"To be supplied by the Inklers?"

It was the Saint's turn to stare. "How did you know?"

"Why do you think I took you to Larue last night, where I knew the Enriquez brothers would be, and where I hoped the Inklers would try to contact them? If they had not done it that night, I would have taken you wherever they went the next night. Why do you think I arranged for Inkler to be delayed, until I had time to tell you about Manuel and Pablo?

"Why do you think I arranged to be called away afterwards so that you would be free to observe what happened and to act as you chose? Why do you think I have never been far away from you since then, even to watching you at sea this afternoon from an airplane, until it got too dark? Meeting you here, of course, was easy: I knew about your reservations as soon as they were made. But you should be grateful to me, instead of wondering whether to use the gun you have under your arm."

"Excuse me," said the Saint, and leaned against the wall.

"I told you I was an unusual policeman," Xavier said. "I received word from your FBI that the Inklers were here, and what to expect from them. They have been in other Central American countries, always working on the discontented element, and usually with the story that they could influence assistance from Washington. So I knew that the Enriquez brothers would be perfect for them. I had a problem. It was my duty not to let the Inklers swindle anyone—yet I did not have much desire to protect Manuel and Pablo. That is why I was most happy that you were here. I was sure I could rely on you for a solution."

Simon's eyes widened in a blinding smile. "Is anything wrong with this one?"

"It is a lot of money." Xavier pursed his lips over it judicially. "But I have no report of any such sum being stolen. And no one has made any accusations against you. I do not see how I can prevent you from leaving with it. On the other hand, I am not very well paid, and I think you owe me something." He took out six of the neat bundles of green paper and distributed them in different pockets of his clothing. "I should like to retire and buy a small hotel in Fortín."

Simon Templar drew a deep breath and straightened up. "One day I must visit you there."

Captain Xavier closed the suitcase and Simon picked it up. Xavier opened another door, and the Saint found himself out on the landing field. In front of him, passengers were boarding the plane.

it couldn't be murder

by . . . Philip Wylie

They just dropped dead — one, two, three — and the police could find nothing wrong. So it was up to a lovelorn artist to trap a killer.

WHEN THE POLICE are confronted by that ugly evidence which is proof positive of premeditated murder they do not first "cherchez la femme." They look immediately, rather, for any persons who might profit by the evil deed. Lust, envy, spite—all these yield place to greed in forming the mental flaw which sets one being cogitating on how to destroy another.

And the horror which accompanies those patient, relentless, often imaginative steps toward homicide is sometimes accentuated by improper setting. For not all sinister human behavior is cloaked in darkness. Not all hellish footsteps echo through murky corridors, empty garrets, abandoned buildings, crypts, caverns, and the tree tunnels of lonely lanes. Sometimes the roaring city, the dazzling street, and white sunlight form the incongruous background for slinking assassins as terrible as any on a storm-swept castle roof or a fog-wrapped moor . . .

It was hot.

Two men walked side by side into the great departure chamber of the Grand Central Station in New York. One was in his early forties. He carried a brief case.

Philip Wylie is probably the most versatile of American authors. In books he has ranged from "Generation of Vipers" to "When Worlds Collide." He has also been a poet, a dramatist, and has turned out fact articles. And he is equally at home in the detective milieu—as you will see from this story.

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His free hand blotted his damp, heavy face. The other was rather more than half his age. He looked exhausted by some inner experience more arduous than the heat.

He was talking urgently as they came down the stairs. "Look here, John! It's silly to forbid Betty and me to see each other! She's twenty-two, after all. Grown—"

John—John Stanton—stalked toward the ticket windows, bumping people as he went. His voice was rasping. "I thought I settled that last night! Or more accurately," he added, "at three A.M. today."

"You didn't. I love her. She loves me. What more . . . ?"

The older man butted into a line at a ticket window and tramped impatiently on one spot while a chauffeur ahead of him bought Pullman reservations for somebody named Poremann. "Once and for all, Jerry! It's out! Frank doesn't want her to marry you. Paul's more dead set than I am. If even one of her brothers was for it . . ."

Jerry flushed and perspired. "It's so darn narrow, John! So Victorian! For you three to cut her off if she keeps on with me—golly! It's in the dime novel tradition!"

John looked immeasurably weary. "You asked for it again, remember! I'll repeat. The Stantons have held a certain position in society—even, you might say, in the nation—for a good many generations. We've lived carefully, married carefully, kept our place. There haven't been any chorus girls in the line—any Stanton girls marrying grooms or butlers. There isn't going to be any Greenwich Village artist—"

"Illustrator," Jerry corrected.

"—illustrator. Your father was a grocer in Iowa—"

"Kansas."

"—your mother taught school. Even your name—*Jenks!* That's enough. I like you all right. Paul does. Frank does. We wish you luck—even. I hope you fill every magazine in the country with pictures of pretty girls. But you can't have Betty—and that's *that!*"

Jerry's face was crimson now. People in the line at the window and people standing over their luggage were listening and grinning. An entrance across the room disgorged a crowd of commuters that fanned out and hunted exits to the blistering morning street.

The young man opened his mouth to speak and closed it. He felt lost. He'd met Betty Stanton at the Illustrators' Ball. That wasn't his fault. He'd fallen in love with her. That too, he felt, was not a fault but something inexorable.

He looked up on the balcony at the vast lithograph display urging the public to visit New England. There were pictures of cool lakes and people swimming and fishing. His gaze went back to John Stanton. He had been on the verge of conceding. But now, inexplicably,

his mind changed. "You can't stop us!"

And John yawned. He yawned with deliberate insult. The eavesdroppers grinned more widely. Anger seemed then to seize him. He interrupted his own yawn, cleared his throat vigorously and raised his voice. "We'll see, Jenks! I'll wire from the train and we'll find out how Betty likes a boycott. Now—beat it! I've listened to you all night! You had the consummate nerve to catch me this morning! Against you as a person I have nothing! Against you as a member of the family . . . !"

He stopped talking. He coughed uncertainly. His eyes showed puzzlement. He took a deep breath and swayed. The color changed in his cheeks.

Jerry realized that he had been taken ill. Suddenly and violently. The heat. His futile rage vanished. "*John!* Take my arm! We'll head for a bench in the waiting room!"

"Yes!" John was panting. "Please! Ah—it's my heart!"

Expression faded swiftly from his eyes. He fell toward the floor. Jerry caught him and yelled fiercely for a porter. There was a sort of quiet pandemonium in the great chamber.

Sickness and collapse occur in all public gathering places. Provision is usually made for the emergencies thereby incurred. They took John to a room where he could lie down. There were two doctors—one who appeared from the throng of commuters when John was seized, another supplied automatically by the station authorities. There was a nurse. A policeman came along with the stretcher.

The doctor who volunteered to aid opened John's shirt and produced a stethescope. Jerry stood beside him, waiting. The doctor's face was tense and blank. He listened and frowned. The man on the bed seemed to Jerry to be breathing weakly. But it might have been an optical illusion—a wishful self-deceit.

Presently the doctor took away his instrument and folded it. "He's gone," he said quietly. "There were faint fibrillations for a moment. My name is MacCarrister. Rye. Are you a relative?"

"No," Jerry replied. "A friend. You're sure?"

The official doctor hurried in then. He said a few words and he listened. He looked at John's eyeball. He nodded.

"What's the name?"

"John Stanton."

"You mean *the* John Stanton."

"Yes," Jerry replied.

The doctor sat on the bed. "Heart. Been bad?"

"I don't know. He was quite an athlete in college."

Dr. MacCarrister described what had happened in technical words. He gave his card to the official medical man. "You can reach me if you need me." He was gone.

"I suppose," Jerry said slowly, "I'd better tell the family."

"Yes." The doctor who had

remained was offhand. "The heat, of course . . ."

Jerry went to a telephone booth. He felt frightened. With cold foreboding he dialed a number which always before he had dialed happily.

"Hello?"

"Oh—Haynes," Jerry said to the butler. "This is Jerry Jenks. I want to speak to Paul." Jerry would rather have broken the news to Frank, who was thoughtful and fairly understanding, but Paul was the next oldest of the three brothers.

"I'm afraid you cannot speak to Mr. Paul Stanton," the butler answered with a kind of incisive relish. "He has forbidden it."

"Get him, please, Haynes. This has to do with John. It is serious."

"I shall *try* to get him, sir."

Jerry waited. Finally he heard Paul's voice. Usually it was ingratiating, although loud and resonant. Now it was only loud. "Well, Jenks? What about John?"

"He's dead." Better tell that first. It would avoid noisy quibbling over any effort made to soften the blow.

"What! How? Accident?"

"No. Heart failure. He keeled over in the station. I was talking to him."

"I'll be right down. Grand Central?"

Jerry told him where his brother could be found. Then he went back to the little room.

Paul came in with Betty about fifteen minutes later. Jerry was sitting on a straight chair. There were cigarette stubs, crushed flat, around his feet. Betty had not been crying—then. She still had most of her color. The heat had curled stray strands of her shining hair. They made golden circles on her forehead. There was anxiety in her eyes. When she saw Jerry she smiled a little and the dark blue of her irises became lighter and more lustrous.

Paul walked toward the bed, nodding to the doctor and the station agent as he went. He turned back the sheet. He frowned —perhaps sadly, perhaps speculatively. He was as heavy a man as John had been—but more handsome. He had dark eyes, thick white eyebrows, hair combed smoothly in a mingling of black and white. His premature grayness was arresting and it gave strength to features otherwise ordinary and complacent.

Betty sat down beside Jerry and took his hand. They stared at each other searchingly, longingly.

"How soon did you get here, doctor?" Paul asked.

"My name's Lane. Almost immediately, Mr. Stanton. Another medical man—I have his card—accompanied your brother here. Mr. Jenks was with him when he collapsed."

Paul turned. "You were baiting him, I presume?" His tone was not precisely threatening. It was one of level condemnation. "Going over the grounds we all covered last night?"

Jerry sat still. "I wasn't baiting him. I was—begging maybe."

"Put it any way you like. You made him angry enough yesterday. That and the heat—"

Dr. Lane intervened. Jerry was grateful to him—and surprised, because his respect for the Stanton name had been obvious. "You cannot blame another person for an accident of that sort. Emotion is not enough. Our hearts are intended to stand it. Heat. Indigestion. And an organic condition. I presume he had a record of trouble . . ."

Paul put back the sheet. He thought while he spoke. "Nothing really serious. He expected this, I suppose, more or less—but not for twenty years more!" He put in words the notion that had been in his mind while he had talked. "It couldn't have been anything else?"

"Anything else?" Dr. Lane was perplexed.

"Anything else!" Paul snapped the words. "Isn't that clear?"

"Oh!" The doctor's small and studious face drew minutely more taut. "No. Classic case. We'll have more of them—if this heat wave turns out to be a real one. Dr. MacCarrister agreed. I'm very, very sorry, Mr. Stanton. For you and for the family. I would like to speak to you of course about the disposition to be made . . ."

He took Paul into another room.

Tears ran down Betty's cheeks then. She pressed Jerry's hand. "Gee," she said softly. "This is terrible—for us."

"I know, dear."

The policeman was listening. "But you mustn't give up, Jerry! I can see what you're thinking! And you mustn't! I love you!"

He looked away. "What can I do—say—now? Paul blames me for this—in a way. He can't help it. Frank will. So will Maude and Les. Everybody!"

"But me."

He took courage with that. "Yes. But you—darling you! All right. They can have Haynes toss me out bodily. I'll come back. They can sic Rex on me. They can—but what they'll do to you!"

"Never mind, dear. Here's Paul again."

That was the way they had fallen in love.

The same courage and vitality that had sent a banished nobleman to America in the eighteenth century to found the Stanton family had sent the Jenkses across the Atlantic — fleeing persecution — westward to Kansas. They were still, behind differences of fortune and class, the same people. Brave and determined people. And if those early fires had dwindled in some of the members of those families—in people like Paul and Frank—they burned nonetheless in a thousand Bettys—in thousands of Jerrys.

"You will come with me," Paul said to his sister. He glanced briefly at Jerry. "I don't believe, under the circumstances, that even

you will fail to see you will be no longer tolerated by the family."

They went away . . .

II

Jerry started for the subway from habit, but his feelings recoiled from the crowds, the pressure, the noise and the steaming suffocation of the place that morning. So he hailed a cab. It took him downtown by way of Fifth Avenue. When he stepped out in front of the large and not very new apartment building in which he lived and held out a dollar bill to the driver, he saw that his hand was shaking. He tipped the man fifteen cents and went up two flights of stairs. He let himself in and a voice greeted him cheerfully.

"Hyah, boy!"

"Hello, Holly!" He walked back toward the end room in his quarters—his studio. Holly was sitting in a chair, reading a magazine. She looked, as usual, young and fresh and very pretty—for a girl who was as seriously determined to become a famous illustrator as was Jerry himself.

He had forgotten that she had agreed that morning to come over and act as his model. Sometimes the situation was reversed. When Holly Barker obtained one of her rare orders for a drawing and when the order demanded "a typical young American with a good chin, straightforward gray eyes and a pair of shoulders," she would telephone for Jerry. It didn't cost her anything that way.

He had forgotten Holly.

She tossed back her luxurious rust-colored hair and started to say something. What she did say was obviously different from what she had intended. "What's the matter? You said nine o'clock and I barged over. You weren't here, so I got the janitor to let me in. You look as if you'd just seen your great, great grandfather not in the flesh!"

Jerry stared at the half-finished oil on his easel before he answered. "I went up to the Stanton house this morning."

"I thought you were going to have that out last night."

"We did. Fireworks enough for a world's fair. But we didn't get any place."

"You mean *you* didn't get any place."

"Listen!" He spoke with the rude vehemence permissible among old and very good friends. "John was going to catch a train for Chicago this morning. He said so last night. So I made him let me ride down to the station with him this morning. I thought maybe he would have cooled off."

"Not on a day like this he wouldn't!"

"Can't you let me finish? Sorry. My nerves are roaring around just now. I argued some more and it didn't do any good. I followed him right up to the ticket window. He practically laughed in my face—or yawned in it—and then he got sore and started to tell me

where to get off all over again. He never finished. He dropped dead."

"He *what!*" Holly instantly shared his mood.

Jerry had been walking around the room. He sat down—hard. "I don't think that he died right away. There was a lot of excitement. People rushed up. They got a stretcher. Some doctor came along and helped out. But anyway he didn't live long. By the time they got him in an emergency room he was all through."

"That's awful, Jerry!"

"Isn't it? Betty and Paul came down later on, and she was terribly decent about it, even though she must have realized that I had probably worked him up to the point where his heart quit."

"Maybe it was a stroke. On a day like this . . ."

"What's the difference? But it *was* heart failure. All those Stantons hated me before. You'd think I'd done something indecent and illegal to Betty. But now—well, Paul told me in so many words to stay away—for good."

Holly nodded. For a time they were silent.

"The whole family will say that I murdered John—or as much as murdered him."

"Yeah," Holly answered softly. "Nice people! I don't suppose you feel much like work this morning."

"I'll say I don't!" He sat still, considering that. He compressed his lips unconsciously and narrowed his eyes. "But, by golly, I think I will! It's better than brooding. It's the only way I'm ever going to get anywhere in my business. Dammit, Holly, I'll marry that girl yet! I'll work so hard and get such a reputation that even the Stantons will have to give an inch for the mile I took. Come on! You know the pose."

She didn't say, "Nice going!" out loud. She said it with her eyes.

Jerry squeezed flake white on his palette. He picked up a brush. He began to paint. "Fingers none too steady." He grinned at her.

"I can imagine." Holly was lying on the floor with her head propped up on three books. The three books were supposed to be the roots of a tree. Where the drafting board stood was presumably an old mossy rock. Beyond it, by the heap of picture frames, was an imaginary brook. The caption which would eventually appear under the finished picture was to be "Daisy used to lie there, chewing a long stem of grass, dreaming."

The grass stem was a soda straw from a milk-shake carton.

She knew he liked to talk when he worked. She knew that he would like to talk now and she knew the subject which was on his mind. He was keeping silent out of deference to some complex code of his own. Her eyes wandered around the familiar room—to the piles of magazines on the floor, the fantastic theatrical

masks he had made, the portraits, the bust of a child he had carved.

"How were things last night?" she inquired after awhile.

Jerry snorted. "The less said the better!" Having relieved himself of that dictum, he proceeded to say a great deal. "Well, of course you don't know the people . . ."

"I feel as if I do, from all you've told me about them."

"I guess. The whole famdamily was there. John and Paul, Frank, Maude and even Les—paring his fingernails as usual, grinning like a billikin and not saying much. Though when John asked him what he thought, he looked at me as if I were something splashed on his windshield and said, 'He's out. But definitely.' Then he cut off another fingernail. That goat—"

"Didn't *any*body help you out?"

"Oh, sure, more or less. In fact Maude got pretty sore. Said it wasn't sporting of the family. Said that her opinion was the solitary intelligent and unprejudiced one in the crowd. Which was correct. She told them she was all for us.

"But John read her a lecture about not being a Stanton. He told Les that he ought to manage his wife better. Les flared up—he's got a honey of a temper although it seldom shows — and tried to tell John to mind his own business. That was a rather nifty little squabble in itself."

"I can imagine."

"Yeah. I suppose that since Les is only a cousin he feels out on the rim of the family. Anyway Maude fought for me and Les fought for Maude. I think Frank would have been on my side if he'd had the nerve to say anything at all. But you know—or rather you don't know—how John yells. I should have said, yelled. He yelled habitually about everything. About what's for breakfast and why doesn't somebody fix the taillight on the Rolls and why doesn't the Republican Party do something sensible.

"Well, finally Paul stood up and made one of his courteous skin-you-alive political addresses on the subject of me and who was I. Where did I come from? What chance was there that I would ever succeed? What stupidity it would be to entrust Betty's share of the millions to a man who had never had a thousand dollars in a lump in his life! How would Betty feel five years from now, not being in the social register any more—not having her old friends?

"Oh, it was lovely! I felt like a specimen in a bell jar. When Paul finished John took up the reins again, pacing around in his dam' dinner jacket and winding up his little address by saying it was 'virtually miscegenation.' "

"Didn't Betty do anything, even at that point?" Holly asked quietly.

"I was going to tell you. Betty slapped John right square on the kisser. A beaut. Then she started to cry and she beat it for her

room. That was the last I was allowed to see of her. *Miscegenation!* I can't say I'm glad to see anybody dead but I will say one thing. John Stanton's heart probably failed because it was too small to take care of his carcass!

"My God! They go around telling you how cultured they are and how refined, and how old and dignified their family is, and then they scream and squabble like a bunch of chimpanzees dividing up a bamboo shoot!"

Holly grinned evanescently. "Well, Jerry. You wanted the gal. You knew what you were getting into. I guess you got in plenty."

"Sure. And I'm going to stay in."

At that point there was a knock at the door. Jerry sauntered down the short dark hall and opened it. A man came in at once—talking as he entered.

"I'm Malloy, of the *Dispatch*. You're Mr. Jenks, aren't you? I understand you were with Mr. Stanton when he died this morning."

Jerry hadn't thought about reporters. There were seven of them that morning.

When the papers appeared Jerry was thrown into a fresh panic. The reporters who had come to his house had made every possible effort both by direct questioning and subtle implication to cause him to admit that he and the "Stanton heiress" were in love, "secretly engaged" or "on the verge of eloping." To protect Betty he had denied it as strongly as he could.

That was difficult, because he had been seen with her at various places for one thing. For another two or three Park Avenue columnists had printed airy meaningful squibs about them. Such things as, "What bonded blueblood is making eyes around town at what struggling-but-promising young illustrator?" Such things as, "What three elite brothers are huffing and puffing because their sister has gone in for oils?"

He had insisted that they were not engaged—only friends. He had said that his reason for accompanying John Stanton to the station had been casual.

But he had not reckoned with the stupid vanity of a great segment of mankind—that particular vanity which assures its dim-witted possessor that nothing is sweeter than your name in the papers, regardless of how it comes to be there.

The *Dispatch* had located such a person—or rather—such a person had doubtless rushed to the offices of the *Dispatch*. A woman. Mrs. Myrtle Darbulony Simmons of Long Island. Mrs. Simmons, from her published photograph, was a middle-aged fleshy baby-faced woman who wore busybody pince-nez glasses and doubtless had a voice that sounded like scratching a blackboard. Jerry vaguely remembered that face.

It appeared that she had been just behind John in the line at the

ticket window that morning. She had heard everything. And she had a phonographic memory as well as a scandalous imagination. Her sense of justice was, however, biased.

Perhaps she felt that by showing a prejudice she would earn the gratitude of the Stantons and maybe even an opportunity to meet them. In that estimate of higher society, if such indeed had been her appraisal, she was woefully wrong. The Stantons would have wished Mrs. Simmons on Mars rather than at the station.

"I was waiting to buy a ticket to Greenwich," she said in her dictated interview with an editor of the *Dispatch,* "right behind the poor deceased magnate. This young person was harrying him from the first. Harrying him about Miss Betty Stanton, whom he had managed somehow to meet and whom he insisted he would marry.

"Mr. Stanton bore up very well and behaved throughout like a gentleman, which is more than I can say for Mr. Jenks. I, myself, burned with outraged indignation as this young Greenwich Village Bohemian swung his fists incessantly and talked in a tone that was alarmingly violent.

"No doubt Mr. Jenks is a radical and believes that all of us should work in mines under whips. In my opinion it was the supreme effort at self-control which finally burst the great heart of Mr. Stanton. He did not want his sister Betty exposed on the altar of communism."

It went on and on. Mrs. Simmons had drawn liberally from her imagination. She had been, no doubt, subtly coached by a fiendishly delighted reporter. But she had put in her monstrous declaration enough actual quotation to make it impossible for Jerry to defend himself. He would have had to admit that certain things ascribed to him were true —and to admit that would have made things only worse for Betty.

He read the story in a seething frenzy—read it aloud to Holly. "There ought to be some way," he said violently, "to keep newspapers from doing this sort of stuff! I could sue them for libel."

Holly nodded sadly. "Sure. And admit you *did* fight with John about Betty. Make a worse mess to clear a mess. If you sued the paper would drag in the Stantons to prove their side."

"But it says I swung my fists! I didn't!"

"They'd maintain you had your hands clenched—in court."

"It says I'm a Communist! Why —why, I voted for Landon! My father knows him!"

"Sure, Jerry. But they'd say that you have models alone here. That I come in when I please. That you're an artist and Bohemian."

"If I knew who prodded that female devil into such frightful nonsense, I'd get that guy—"

"*Hey!* Wait a minute! It's Mrs.

Simmons who poured gasoline on the fire! And the world is crammed with those self-righteous creatures—full of incendiary platitudes—creeping around interfering! The mistake you made was to get mad in public."

"Yeah." He thought for a moment and then went to the phone.

Holly was alarmed. "Whom are you calling?"

"The Stantons."

"What for?"

"They've *got* to know that most of this is rubbish. They've *got* to!"

"Probably they do."

She waited.

He said, "Hello, Haynes. I'd like to speak to Mr. Paul Stanton. This is important. Yes, it's Mr. Jenks." There was a pause. Jerry put back the phone. "Hung up," he said. "Well, let's finish the rest of these feeble-minded stories."

She shook her head dubiously. "Why bother? It's just the usual newspaper rubbish. They're bound to go to town on the Stantons. Bradstreet's and the Blue Book. Old family. Leading citizen stuff. They're like all other rich people. They've lived down the undoubted pirate who founded the fortune and now whenever they have a cold it's news. When they die—it's the works. I'd skip it."

"Nix. We read—every word. John's great works—gifts to charity—companies directed—committees chairmanned—all of it."

He was correct in saying "stories" for there was more than a mere obituary for John Stanton. Besides the recitation of his biography—in every paper a somewhat cut-and-dried account of the head of a large and snobbish family—many other items pertaining to the Stantons were called to the view. If the death had occurred on a day when there had been important foreign news or a sporting event of national interest, a major catastrophe or a sensational shift in the stock market, it would have received less attention.

They read them back and forth.

"Here," Jerry said, "is the old familiar feature about Maude—'Mrs. Leslie Stanton, wife of a cousin of the deceased, is the well known sportswoman and African big game hunter. Not only are some of Mrs. Stanton's specimens on display at the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D. C., but she brought back from the Congo a film of her exploits, *Jungle Jeopardy,* which proved popular last year.'"

Jerry grunted. "Maude is all right. Listen to what they say about Frank and his wife. She wasn't there last night by the way. 'Mr. Frank Stanton, youngest brother of the dead man, has what is said to be the largest postage stamp collection in America. He has lived a retiring life and, except for his marriage to winsome Molly Evans, the musical comedy star, in nineteen twenty-seven, has been less in the public eye than his brothers . . .'"

Holly interrupted him at that point. "Anyway the tragedy hasn't stopped Paul's ambition. It says here that he intends to go right ahead with his campaign for Congress. The funeral is going to be held at the Old Stone Church day after tomorrow but tomorrow our Paul apparently is going to speak. Lousy taste, I call it. Listen. 'Asked whether or not he would now abandon his campaign for Congress in the silk-hat district, Mr. Paul Stanton, who was scheduled to make several outdoor addresses tomorrow, replied. "Sad and shocking although the death of my brother is, I am determined to an even greater degree to hew to the line of duty. In spite of my bereavement I shall fufill all planned speaking engagements." ' "

Holly executed a ladylike equivalent of the snort. "I'll bet your friend Paul is secretly pleased at the publicity coming his way right now. What does he want to go to Congress for anyway?"

Jerry shrugged. "Same reason Mrs. Simmons told all she heard and more to the reporters—to get in the public eye." He turned a page. "My God, they've even got to Betty!"

He stared for a minute at a picture of the blond girl he loved. She was dressed as she had been that morning at the station. She looked very worn and miserable.

Holly glanced at the picture, murmured, "She's certainly lovely," and continued her researches. "Even the servants!" she said after a long silence. " 'Albert Haynes, for eleven years butler in the elaborate Stanton menage, expressed his sorrow over the untimely death of the head of the family. "Mr. Stanton was a stern but just man." To those words were added similar expressions by other servants, among them Marcel Peltz, the chef who has for years been celebrated by New York gastronomes for his unusual practice of growing his own herbs and spices in the garden and hothouse attached to the Seventy-sixth Street Stanton residence.' "

Holly threw down the newspaper. "Well, he's gone in all his glory. Relatives that hunt lions and cooks that grow sassafras. The light's too weak to paint now, Leonardo, and I could do with a bit of food. Afterward I think we ought to go to a movie—an air-conditioned one. In my opinion it's getting hotter."

Jerry put down the paper.

As they started out of the apartment the telephone rang.

He went back to it.

It was Betty. She spoke rapidly. "I'm calling from the drugstore on Madison Avenue and I haven't got much time. How are you, darling?"

"I'm fair."

"Look. Did you see the papers?"

"Sure. They're terrible. I'm thinking of going out to Long Island personally and strangling Mrs. Simmons."

"That's what I called up about.

Paul is furious. The whole house is in an uproar. You'd think with John dead that at least until the funeral was over they'd try to act decent about things. But Paul's been awfully nasty. When the reporters were here just now he practically blamed you for what happened to John. I wish you'd go and see him about it."

"He won't talk to me."

"Then break in on him somewhere. He's going to speak up at Cabot Park tomorrow noon. And I happen to know he hasn't anything to do for lunch. Maybe, if you catch him after the speech..."

"I'll try."

"That's one thing. The other is I'm going to go away for a few days. I'll write you where when I get there. So maybe you can come and see me wherever it is. It's a cinch you couldn't see me here. I'll leave right after the funeral."

"Good." Jerry's voice was unsteady with emotion. "Are you doing all right?"

"You bet I'm doing all right."

"Keep your chin up!"

"Goodbye, darling."

"Goodbye, honey."

Jerry and Holly started for some early supper and an air-cooled movie . . .

III

There wasn't a cloud in the sky. Even the smoke umbrella over the city seemed to have been baked out of existence by the sun. It was late in the season for such a hot spell but New York had escaped its customary siege of excessive temperature so far that summer.

Jerry came up from the steaming cavern of the subway and blinked in the blistering sunlight. He looked at his watch—eleven-fifty. He walked four blocks east—through a shabby section where elevated trains roared and fat women in kimonos leaned on pillows placed to prevent iron fire escapes from burning them. Then past a block of smart moderne apartment buildings, and into Cabot Park.

A loudspeaker was giving vent to a radio recording. It was Paul Stanton's theme song *Anchors Aweigh*. The raucous music, together with posters on the speaker's truck, had already gathered a hundred-odd citizens. They waited in the baking shade of a group of wilted sycamores—nurses with babies, elderly gentlemen from the smart apartments, a colored cook or two, janitors in their shirt-sleeves, exhausted pedestrians, park bums, a man selling balloons. It was not a heartening crowd but every word Paul would speak had already been forwarded to the newspapers *For immediate release*.

Jerry joined the crowd, wondering why Paul had picked on *Anchors Aweigh* for his song and then remembering that one of the planks in his campaign platform was a bigger navy. Ten minutes passed while more records were played. Then Jerry saw Paul com-

ing briskly from his limousine. His attitude of vitality was marred by the fact that he was mopping his forehead with a large linen handkerchief.

He stepped on the open end of the truck, faced the crowd and the apartments across the street and began to talk. Jerry paid little attention to what he said. It was the usual political jargon, couched now in an elite accent. Democracy must be preserved . . . Democracy must be protected . . . The enemies of the people lurk at every hand . . .

The sound of a human voice haranguing in authoritative tones will always collect a crowd. The hundred-odd slowly became three or four hundred. Paul warmed to his oration and Jerry waited in stultified sweating discomfort for the finish.

But Paul Stanton never finished his appeal to the people of New York City. He reached a climax of eloquence—"Shall we longer permit this perfidious continuum? Ahhh! We shall *not!*"

He stopped. The vague and rolling expression of the orator's eyes became a sudden sharp look of pain. He swallowed hard. He licked his lips. He seized the railing of the truck.

Jerry watched with mounting horror as Paul half-staggered, drew himself up and said in a choked tone, "I'm sorry, my friends. I've been taken suddenly ill. The heat—my heart . . ."

He put one hand over his chest and with the other seized his throat. His campaign manager, who had been sitting beside him, grabbed his arm and helped him down from the truck. They started toward Paul's limousine.

Jerry followed them. When Paul's steps grew weak and very uncertain, he aided. But before they reached the car Paul's feet failed altogether and his head fell forward.

With the help of the campaign manager and a bystander they lifted the stricken man into the automobile and started down the street in search of a doctor's office. Jerry rode on the running board and yelled when he saw a shingle. It said, "A. M. Black, M.D."

Dr. Black was in—a thin red-headed Scotchman with deep-set eyes, who hurried to the car at his curb. He bent over, examined hastily, then said, "You'd better bring him to the office. I'm afraid he's in bad shape!"

For sometime, in the offices of the unknown physician, there was a frenzied almost wordless activity. Unlike the two doctors who had attended John, Dr. Black did not resign himself to the inevitability of death. He worked with a fierce dexterity, whispering commands to his nurse. "Amyl nitrite!" He shook his head. "We'll try adrenalin!" "Yes, that needle!" "Take off his coat, young man!" "Iodine, please." "Hold his shirt back!"

It was no use.

Paul Stanton was gone beyond

recall. Dr. Black exhausted his resources. Only then did he ask, "Who is this man?"

The campaign manager told him and added, "My name is Collins. I suppose I better go down and break the news to his family. It's going to be tough. You see, yesterday his brother died—the same way."

Jerry heard himself speaking. "Let me do it." He didn't know quite why he had said that. It was largely because he wanted to be with Betty—somewhat because he wanted to help her family. And perhaps, in a small and unconscious degree, because he hoped that the Stantons might now receive him. It had been John and Paul who had most violently disliked him.

"Who are you?" Collins asked.

"A friend. I was expecting to have lunch with Paul. I'll hop in a cab—it isn't far. You stay here with—the body."

He went.

As he closed the door the doctor was saying, ". . . sometimes—like an occasional appendicitis. Psychic effect. One member of the family gets it and then another—as if it were catching."

The blinding blocks passed quickly. The brakes ground. There was the house, the walled garden with the glittering glass of the conservatory behind it. Jerry clanged the gate. An elevated on Third Avenue rumbled and was still.

Haynes opened the door widely.

"I want to see anybody in the family. Everybody."

Haynes was ice. "I'm sorry, sir. Nobody is in, sir. I might add that I think it was impertinent of you to come here at this time, sir." His mouth moved almost as if he intended to smile.

"I'm sorry, Haynes, but you're going to let me in."

"As it happens," the butler answered, "I am speaking the truth. Not a single member of the family *is* in. Not that it matters, sir. Mr. Paul Stanton has given me orders concerning you."

"Mr. Paul Stanton," Jerry answered quietly, "is dead."

The butler stared. His jaw dropped. He did not sway but balanced back and forth agitatedly on his feet. Jerry was sure afterward that there came into his eyes an expression of fear and conjecture.

Then the gate clanged. Betty was coming hurriedly up the walk. "Oh, darling," she cried, "you shouldn't have come here! I don't think Haynes will let even *me* let you in."

She was on the steps, beautiful, distraught, affectionate. He told her. He made his account lucid but brief.

She stood numbly for a while and then unconsciously moved out of the sunlight. "That's awful!" she said softly. "*Awful!* Come in."

Haynes stood aside.

The drawing room was vast, Victorian and gloomy. If any

place could have been cool without artificial refrigeration that day it would have been the Stanton drawing room. The two huge chandeliers that hung above its ornate furniture were like ice carvings. No sun penetrated the heavily draped front windows and only a quiet melange of dull color descended from three stained-glass side windows to the dark mahogany and the thick Persian carpet.

Betty was not crying. She spoke her random thoughts slowly and quietly. "It'll be strange without either one of them. I couldn't agree with them always—but I was fond of them. I sent you there, didn't I, Jerry? You say you helped him to the car?"

"I don't think he knew who was helping him."

She nodded her head several times. "I see. He was foolish to go out on a day like this. He was foolish to run for Congress anyway, I think. But it doesn't matter now—*does* it? You say Mr. Collins is up there?"

"Yes."

"What are you supposed to do, Jerry? I don't really know. I never had to . . ." Her lip quivered.

He took her hand. "Neither did I but I'll do it. We ought to call the undertaker. Where's Frank?"

She shook her head. She led him to the hall and he made the necessary phone call. Afterwards she tugged a red velvet bell pull and Haynes appeared.

"Wasn't Frank coming here for lunch with Molly?" she asked.

"Yes, Miss Betty. At one o'clock."

"It's one now, isn't it?"

"Two minutes past."

"And Les was coming too? With Maude?"

"Yes, Miss Betty."

"Please set a place for Mr. Jenks."

"But—"

"I said, Haynes, a place for Mr. Jenks."

"Yes, Miss Betty."

Jerry's impressions after that were confused. Too little happened—too much was thought and felt.

Maude and Leslie Stanton arrived first. As she came through the door she quenched a laugh but she said to Betty, "I can't be too reverent about these things. I liked John well enough but he was a dreadful grouch. Maybe if Paul goes to Washington we can invest this mausoleum with a little cheer."

Then Betty told her.

Maude reacted violently and simply. "Great heavens, child, why didn't you throttle me when I came in? That's frightful!"

Leslie Stanton ran his fingers through his hair over and over and over and kept repeating, "Two of them. Both of them. Two of them. It's ghastly!"

He was their cousin, a chemical engineer by profession—a nervous saturnine man—tall and rather good-looking.

Molly—Frank's wife—was the least readable of them all.

Molly wept. Perhaps it was partly play-acting but perhaps the abandonment of a glamorous career on Broadway for an unexciting and even stuffy life with Frank Stanton had given her too little opportunity to express any emotion whatever. Certainly it had faded her rather overt good looks to near-dowdiness. And yet, in spite of all that, she seemed to think first and with relief that it had not been her husband.

Frank turned his back on them. He walked gravely toward the stained-glass windows, lifted his head and looked up into their browns and crimsons. They saw his hands clench together behind his back, tight and shaking a little. By and by he said, "It has to come for all of us."

Then he voiced a thought which must have been in the mind of everyone. "But good Lord! There wasn't anything the matter with Paul's heart—he had the constitution of an ox! He took care of himself as if he were cut glass. I can't understand it."

Haynes frightened them by clearing his throat. "Luncheon is served."

On the way in Betty took Jerry's arm. She hugged it a little and whispered, "I'm so glad you're here! *So* glad!"

Then they sat down and pretended to eat.

Afterward he and Betty went out into the garden together. A high wall shielded it from the street. Jerry had never seen it before. It seemed to contain a thousand different sorts of flowers. She watched him as he looked at it—and smiled sweetly and forlornly. "It *is* lovely, isn't it? I can imagine that under other circumstances we'd have enjoyed it —you and I."

"Yes." He looked back at her. "I didn't know that the Stantons—I mean John or Paul—cared for things like this."

She seated herself on a stone bench. "I don't suppose Paul ever noticed what grew here. John liked to show it off because it *is* impressive. But it's really Marcel's hobby."

He remembered. "In the papers—of course."

"Yes. They had even that, didn't they? But Marcel's quite famous for his cooking. People who love to eat love to eat here. I wonder . . ."

"Wonder what?"

"If it'll ever make any difference to me any more whether I eat spinach or lima beans—squab or hamburgers?"

"You bet it will! Someday, Betty. Someday . . ."

"Someday." She went on talking about the garden for the mere sake of talking. "Marcel raises all his herbs and spices and things out here — and yonder in the greenhouse. He grows the flowers just because he likes them. When John realized how good he was at it he put on an assistant gardener

to help him. I used to come out here when I was a little girl and hide in the plants and pretend I was in some distant country. It was fun!"

They smiled at each other. Footsteps coming along the gravel walk stopped that half-sad and half-romantic reminiscence. They saw that it was Molly.

She looked at them and smiled diffidently. "Not disturbing . . . ?"

They said, "Not at all," in unison.

"It's hot everywhere. I thought I'd try it here." She sat down on the bench beside Betty. Jerry measured her—her exquisite and still-young profile the aspect, or maybe it was only a feeling, of something faded—the slow way in which she moved and the careful way in which she spoke.

Behind all that was more—a concealed energy—a camouflaged and leashed violence. Repressions from her lost career, probably. Regrets, impatience, hates, maybe. She went on talking softly. "I know how you must feel, Betty. And I thought it was very brave of you to insist on having your young man stay here for luncheon."

"Not brave, Molly. I needed help."

"Yes. It's terrible. John—and then Paul. It's worried me dreadfully about Frank's health. I've just been thinking that I must see to it that he has a thorough checkover. At once. Paul seemed so strong. And Frank seems weakest of the three . . ."

"I wouldn't worry," Betty answered. "Frank's well enough. Paul just overdid things. And probably John's death not only put an unendurable strain on him—but frightened him, in a way."

Jerry entered the conversation then, because it had languished. "That's what Dr. Black said. Told us it was psychologically catching—or something of the sort."

"I wonder?" Molly's china-blue eyes met his and moved away, not in avoidance but in ever-traveling and never-fulfilled search. "It's going to be arduous for some time. The publicity. The photographers." For an instant her expression brightened.

"They were at our house early this morning! I was really *forced* to pose for an hour. It reminded me of the times when—but I shouldn't think of them in this connection." She turned to Betty. "Now you and Frank will have the responsibility for the whole estate. You and Frank—and Leslie."

Betty did not respond to that until she saw a frown on Jerry's face. "Molly means—that we've had a system for dividing inheritance in the family for generations. A system of pro-rating. I hadn't thought about that."

Jerry was still frowning. He hadn't thought about it either. Perhaps ever since he had met Betty his most passionate wish had been that by magic she might

have changed from a wealthy girl to a poor one. In the last analysis it was riches and riches alone which stood between them. The two tragedies had now vastly increased that barrier. He still did not speak.

Betty thought he wanted an explanation. "I forget just how it goes. Frank and I will receive most of what Paul and John possessed. Les gets a certain specified part. There will be quite large sums for Haynes and Marcel. It's always like that. If it had happened to me, then they—but let's not talk about such things."

"No," he said slowly. "Let's not. It only makes—me being here, caring for you—seem more impossible."

Then she understood why he had been silent. "Jerry," she said gently. "I'm sorry! It was stupid of me to go into sordid matters. It's just that—a custom among us —everybody knows about it, I mean."

IV

Jerry wanted to put his arms around her then and tell her not to talk about anything. But Molly sat there, watching them vaguely. And deep inside himself was the bitter realization that now his Betty would be rich in her own right. Worth millions, sought after, courted. Valuable for something besides her own self. That was uncomplicated and unaffected—emotional and yet sensible. But millions—millions made her both more and less than a charming girl.

So he stood there.

And then Maude came into the garden—briskly with long strides. Her skirts swished. Her wide-set eyes were quickly appraising, quick to be friendly. She looked like what she had been so often—a huntress. Not like a predatory huntress but a Diana—a woman who thought like a man, acted like one and who, in her most feminine moods, was doubtless never less than regal. Had an imaginary superman searched for an ideal comrade and pal he might have decided to end his quest upon meeting Maude.

She talked coolly, helpfully. "I've done everything I promised at lunch. Seen about Paul. We—Reverend Daniels and I—thought it would be best to postpone John's funeral—for Paul's. The family wanted it. *They* would have wanted it that way, too. I had a long talk with Dr. Black. He's a very intelligent man. I . . ." She looked at Molly.

Betty said, "That was swell of you, Maude."

"I — hate to discuss these things."

Molly shrugged delicately. "We must, I suppose . . ."

"Well—" Maude decided to go ahead. "I suggested an autopsy."

Betty stared. Molly swallowed and gasped, "Oh! You couldn't!"

"I did, though. Dr. Black thought it was unnecessary. Said it was clearly heart failure. Paul's

own doctor—Schmidt—thought it couldn't have been organic. Something sudden—shock. He said Paul had a fair heart for his age."

Betty was quite pale. She licked her lips. "But an autopsy . . . !"

Maude took her arm in a sisterly way. "Oh! I see what you're thinking! That wasn't in my mind. Heavens, no! I just felt that for our own satisfaction we ought to know exactly what was the matter. And I thought too that medical science is interested in sudden things like this. Dr. Black agreed with me there."

Betty had somewhat recovered her poise. "For a minute I thought that you suspected somebody had —had—never mind. I can't bear to think of an—autopsy!"

Maude nodded. "Neither could Les—or Frank when I put it up to him. I'm too matter-of-fact and I know it. But I didn't mean to hurt you, Betty. You either, Molly. You just don't do autopsies in this family out of mere medical curiosity. I shouldn't have suggested it. Anyway—everything's arranged. We'll have the service day after tomorrow." She said the last sentence gently. "And then we'll try to get over it all the best we can."

Betty nodded. "You make me feel pretty uncourageous — and grateful besides. I guess I need something in the nature of an older sister right now."

"Sure you do!" Maude turned then to Jerry. She studied him for a moment—a very faint smile on her lips. "And in that capacity I'd like to speak to you, Jerry. Betty's tired and shot. She ought to go to bed. And you ought to beat it. If any good comes out of all this catastrophe you can bring it to Betty.

"I know you feel frightfully sorry for her—but it isn't good taste or good sense to barge in constantly now, just because you can. I'm for you, and Frank will be, and in the end you'll be all right. Just—let her alone more or less for awhile, hunh?"

Jerry flushed and his answering smile was warm. "You're right. I'll go now, Betty. And call tomorrow. If you want me in between—you know my number." He touched her hand and she nodded. He turned to Maude. "Thanks—lots. You're a dear."

Maude shook her head. "I just know a good kid when I see one."

Haynes opened the door for him when he went out and said a grudging, "Good afternoon."

And Jerry walked toward the subway, feeling happier than he had felt for many weeks. The deaths of Betty's brothers had shocked him. But he was too honest with himself to pretend that they had brought to him a deep sorrow. Both men had been superficial and overbearing. The world would not miss them much or for long. Betty had loved neither one profoundly—dutifully, rather. He was on a train when he realized that he too was exhausted.

It came to him in the night, waking him up. A mere thought. Of course—Betty had held it in her mind fearfully for a moment also when Maude had considered autopsy.

Supposing it had been—

Murder.

He sat up in bed. Perspiration burst out upon him. He switched on the light. He saw his face in a mirror and it was pale. He walked into his studio and found a cigarette. The light, the city sounds, the familiar curl of smoke drove away that nightmarish idea. Maybe he had been dreaming.

He was calm again when he extinguished the cigarette and put out the light. Maybe he had dreamed something. A hangover from the alarming instant Betty had experienced when she had assumed that by mentioning autopsy Maude had been thinking of—murder.

Foolish. It couldn't be murder. Both men had died in broad daylight in the middle of crowds. He'd actually seen both of them die — and nobody had even touched them. The doctors would have noticed any signs of violence. But poison — he thought about poison. Suppose they had both swallowed something — John at breakfast, Paul sometime before his speech? He wondered what poison would act that way.

By and by he went back to sleep. But in the morning the fantastic speculation returned. It clouded his mind as he worked. For he was working again—with Holly as his model. Working feverishly as an anodyne to last until Betty phoned for him.

This time Holly sat on a bookcase and her hands clung to its edge. The bookcase was, by hypothesis, the cabin of a small cruiser and she was talking to an imaginary youth in the cockpit below. The white wall behind her was part of a sail. The green top of a tree, in the court between the wing where Jerry lived and the wing beyond, was a wave.

He painted steadily and told her about the day before. Only one reporter called—there had been a siege of them late the previous afternoon—and that one was speedily dispatched.

"So you see, Holly, things could be worse!"

"I'm glad. Look. Shall I put one knee up? People like pretty knees in magazine illustrations—and mine are mighty pretty."

"You're on a boat, lug! You can't take a pose that throws you off balance!"

"On a boat—but no sea breeze! When I walked over this morning two kids were trying to fry an egg on the walk. And believe it or not the egg was frying fine!"

Ten minutes passed. His brush made small slapping sounds. "Say," he muttered finally.

His tone made her break her pose. "Something, Raphael?"

"A thing occurred to me last night. You'd think I was crazy if I told you . . ."

"Put your mind at ease. I think so anyway."

He failed to grin. "Not a funny thing—a stupid one. But it sticks in my craw. Maybe, if I did tell, I'd shake it off."

"Shoot."

He hesitated. "It's about the Stantons . . ."

"Naturally, my love-struck Leonardo." Her words were flippant. Her eyes, however, were alert and sober.

"About John and Paul. John apparently had a bum heart. But Paul didn't. Kind of funny, their dying a day apart. And the thing that came into my dim brain was—"

"—that they didn't die naturally."

His eyes raced from the canvas. "Why—yes! Had you thought of that?"

"Just idly—as a girl will. Plenty of people will think of it before the ashes are cold. Why not? But what of it? They're probably wrong. And nobody is going to be able to investigate. It looks like a simple coincidence and the doctors say it is. The odds at Lloyds are probably a thousand to one it's a simple coincidence. Paul probably ate diamond-backed terrapin and coupe Jacque the night before. I don't think the tragic demise of his brother spoiled his celebrated appetite."

"Sure. But it gave me a chill."

"I should think it would give *you* a chill," Holly exclaimed.

He stared. "Me? Why me particularly?"

Holly then looked flabbergasted. "Having thought so far, didn't you pursue your ghoulish speculation one more step? Why *you* indeed! Because you were right beside John and right in front of Paul when it happened! And because you had three beautiful possible motives for wishing those two men not to be. You disliked them to put it mildly. You love their sister and they stood between you and her. Then—if they were disposed of and you married the girl—you would be in the way of taking over some twenty million dollars."

He gazed at her a moment longer and then began to laugh. "It's a conviction! Sure I poisoned them. I did it with an invisible trained tarantula I keep secreted in my ear! Golly! What minds women have!"

"Usually you deny they have any!" Holly was laughing too then. She resumed her pose.

And Jerry recommenced to paint. "You can smoke if you like. I'll fool with this sail. It looks as if it were starched. Well, tomorrow my victims will be ashes and the evidence destroyed. I still wonder, though, if there is any kind of poison that could do a job like that?"

"Why?"

"Why what?"

"Why do you wonder?"

"Oh." He gestured with his brush. "Just idly—as men do.

Something in a capsule that would melt after being swallowed and make a collapse look like heart failure."

"I dunno," she answered. "Be kind of interesting to look up."

He said, "Yeah—would." Then he became lost in the problem of painting a sail so that it would fairly push the boat off the page of a certain popular magazine.

That night he and Holly went to another picture.

The next day he worked without her. A whole day on waves and sky. With the thermometer at ninety. No reporters bothered him. They were sitting unwillingly in the sepulchral gloom and tedious heat of the Old Stone Church and following the Stantons and their myriad friends to the crematory—pursuing step by step the liturgy and last rites for John and Paul—listening to the organ music and the grossly flamboyant encomiums and noting how the women wore their mourning. How they wore it and what couturier had hastily made it—Betty and Maude and Molly.

Holly dropped in at six. She was carrying a book. "Haloo, Matisse! Finished yet?"

"For the moment. Haloo-haloo! Reading? Didn't know you could."

She held up the back of the book. He perceived its title—*Poisons and Their Antidotes*. He whistled. "Still pursuing the sinister?"

"Just curious. So I bought this. You ought to read it. All sorts of useful information—in the event that you get bothered by your companions."

He nodded. "Think I will. I may want to get rid of a pretty egregious model I occasionally use."

"Really? But she knows all the antidotes! Seriously — I've been perusing this thing all day. It's remarkable. You can get stuff out of common weeds and ordinary flowers, if you know how, that'll tie your Aunt Ella in knots in no time."

"And you discovered that John and Paul were unmistakably the victims of—"

"—of about twenty different ones if they were. Pretty nearly half of these little things make you gasp and waver and choke and collapse."

"Pleasant."

She grinned. "*You're* still eating?"

"If I don't get these pictures in —or if Mr. Joselyn happens not to like them—I won't be eating much longer."

"He'll like them. They're swell."

Jerry gazed at her for a moment. "Say! In all the hurly-burly, I've forgotten to ask about *your* affairs. You got that book to illustrate, didn't you?"

She smiled and tossed back the rusty luxury of her hair. "An etcher named Miller got it."

His whistle, if a whistle can be emotional, contained both sympathy and affection. "Say! That's tough. Look! I could lend you

fifty bucks till *Household Magazine* kicks through for these."

Holly grinned. "The Barkers don't borrow until the sheriff is breathing down their necks. But you might buy me some chop suey."

They went out together . . .

V

The following morning was somewhat cooler. Clouds covered the sky. Here and there in Manhattan quick unsatisfactory showers steamed on the pavements. During the afternoon thunder rolled steadily over toward New Jersey. Fewer urchins splashed and floundered around open fire hydrants. The day's toll of prostrations dropped. But the weather report was not reassuring and by noon the breeze dropped and the abnormal heat returned with sullen emphasis.

People are restive in such weather. Jerry had been almost unable to work. He should have completed the last of his three canvases that day, but he did not.

He took two showers.

He tried painting in the altogether for a while.

He phoned Holly but her roommate said she had gone to the beach.

He wanted, of course, to call Betty. He had not heard from her since the afternoon he had spent with her in the garden. He fought the impulse but he began to worry. Perhaps, in spite of Paul's death, she had carried out her original plan of going away.

He fidgeted around his room. He read for a while in the book about poison which Holly had left. It was a bizarre and morbid book but it failed to hold his attention.

At one-thirty he made coffee for himself. At two Mr. Peck of the *Woman's Review* called to ask him to come up in a day or so to discuss illustrating a serial by a famous author. Ordinarily that would have made him turn handsprings across his studio. It was roomy and bare enough for handsprings. But now, with his biggest opportunity in sight, he was unable to rejoice.

It was a little after two when he decided he would call. He dialed the Stanton number and asked Haynes for Betty.

Her voice reassured him greatly. "Oh, darling! I was just going to call you! Must be telepathy. I want you to come for dinner tomorrow night. The whole family will be here. And it won't be very gay. But they're all willing that you join us. Practically as a member."

"That's wonderful!"

"Isn't it! I tried to get you yesterday evening."

"Did you! I was out."

She laughed. "So I discovered. With another girl, I bet!"

"I was *not!*" There was a ring of candor in his voice. He meant it. Then he reflected that he *had* been out with another girl. Holly. But she was so old and familiar

a friend that he hadn't counted her as a girl. The error was amusing—and he did not bother to rectify his statement. It was both exhilarating and reassuring to talk with Betty.

He remembered the offer that had just come. "I have a surprise for you. I don't suppose there's a chance of dropping in—or meeting you anywhere—today?"

"I wish there were. But I'm taking Frank over to see my dentist at three. Dr. Burdeckl."

"Can't Frank go to the dentist alone?"

She laughed again. "I guess so. Though he has a phobia about his teeth. Molly has been pretty frightened over his health. I can understand that. She made him see two doctors and they said all he needed was some dentistry. He was so sunk that I took pity on him. Said I'd take him to my man—he's marvelous—and wait for him. Frank's been drinking highballs all morning to get his nerve up."

"All right. It'll be tomorrow then."

"At seven. 'Bye, darling."

"Good-bye, gal!"

The call elevated his spirits. Betty was still in town, still as fond of him as ever. An important magazine was considering the use of his work for an important serial. It was stupendous! And he realized, with all those blessings then apparent, that he was hungry.

He went down to the corner drugstore and had two lemonades and two club sandwiches.

Afterward he started on a walk. The skies threatened rain and occasional big drops fell. Trees turned up the silver undersides of their branches. But the imminent storm did not break. He walked at random, downtown, over to the river, back through the Italian section and into Washington Square, which was not far from his home. He had taken no exercise for days and the promenade made him feel better at every step. In the Park he sat down for a full half hour, smoking and day-dreaming.

When he rose to return the clouds had broken and the promising gusts of wind had died down. The heat, tense and humid, stifled his breath. He walked slowly through exhausted and straggling crowds to his apartment and up the stairs.

When he opened the door he smelled fresh tobacco smoke. He thought it was Holly and called, "Hi, gal!"

But it wasn't. Sitting in the only good chair in his studio was a man in a blue serge suit. A tall sinewy man with an affable Irish face. A man of about forty-five—a total stranger—who grinned at Jerry cryptically and said in an amiable bass, "Sorry to startle you, Jenks. But I've been waiting here since half-past four."

Jerry had two feelings—one of irritation at the man's composure, another of undefined alarm. "Who—what. . . ?"

"Just dropped in," said the man, "to ask you where you've been since two o'clock."

"Walking. But—"

"Walking where?"

"Around. Down to the River. But—" Then Jerry's color faded.

The stranger frowned and watched him. "You get it, I see. Yeah. I'm a cop. I'm Riley. My job is homicide. I came over here to arrest you for murder—three murders."

Jerry sank slowly on a battered chest. Then his head snapped up. "Three? What *three?*"

"The three Stanton brothers." The detective became an image of pure concentration. He leaned toward Jerry. His eyes were sharp stars. His hands were limp in his lap.

And Jerry said nothing for a moment. His face blanched. His chin began to quiver. His eyes misfocussed. "Has—did—something happen to Frank? It's—impossible! Betty told me not three hours ago that she was taking him to the dentist."

"What dentist?"

"I don't know." Jerry was nearly incoherent. "Bleekel or some such name. Is *she* all right?"

"Yeah. Look, Jenks, can you prove where you went on this walk?"

"Prove it? How? I just wandered around—everywhere."

Riley shook his head. He sat there thinking for a full minute. Finally he said, "That business about arresting you was bunk. I haven't a warrant. I just wanted to know how you'd take it. You see—Frank Stanton dropped dead in the dentist's chair at a quarter past three this afternoon.

"Heart failure—apparently. His sister was in the waiting room and the dentist was in his laboratory getting a tool or something. Miss Stanton herself called us. She was frantic. Two people can possibly drop dead in a family. But not three. Not unless there's been some tampering with the laws of chance. Right now we're not saying anything. The papers are going to get a story of natural causes. But the chief sent me out to talk to you. And here I am."

Jerry was staring. "God, that's awful!"

"Murder usually is. I'm not saying it's murder. We're having a post mortem done right now. Then we'll know more. But if you can't prove what you did this afternoon — and if it *was* dirty work—you're going to be in a spot."

"Yes," Jerry answered softly. "I can see that."

The detective crossed his legs. "Cigarette?"

"Thanks."

He smiled in a friendly manner at Jerry. "Personally, I'd bet a year's wages your bill of health is clean."

Jerry was startled. "Why?"

"Because—if you'd done it and found me here and I accused you —you being, if I may say so, an emotional if brainy guy—you'd

have either raised hell denying it or gotten clever on me. You merely acted like a kid finding out about Santa Claus.

"Now look, Jenks. I'm a cop. I'm not a fool or a softy. When this third death breaks in the papers everybody on earth is going to yell at the Department. But I'm as much a human being as you. And from where you sit you might help us more than all the flat-feet and savvy guys on our payroll. I'd like you to throw in with me."

Life was returning to the young artist. "You bet I will!"

"Don't be too excited about the idea. It may be tough for you. Suppose we prove Frank Stanton was knocked off. And suppose things begin to point to the girl. Would you turn her in?"

"Betty? It couldn't be! Besides —she phoned for you."

Riley shrugged. "Maybe—maybe not. Though more than one murderer has called the cops. She had the same motives you have. Opportunity—until she can prove she didn't. And who knows what a dame in love will do if she thinks she's going to miss out?"

Jerry didn't answer.

The detective watched him. Finally he said, "See here. I've read lots about these people—besides everything that was printed in the last few days. I talked to Betty Stanton for awhile before I came over here. The way the family fortune gets split up makes everyone a possible candidate until we rule them out.

"For instance, Leslie Stanton isn't especially wealthy. He will be now. That includes his wife. Molly is going to be worth millions now. Betty, we've mentioned. The net coming to the butler and the chef will be a decent sum. The Stantons' wills always pensioned off favorite servants. Those two birds may be in for fifty or even a hundred thousand apiece.

"Besides that plenty of outsiders disliked the Stantons. I haven't got a list in my memory right now—but there are a few birds and maybe a few women who would have enjoyed doing the job. John and Paul were bachelors. Their private lives will stand a lot of poking around in.

"What I mean is—this may prove to be one of the trickiest jobs the Department ever undertook. And there will be dough and influence and pride to block us at every turn. I can guarantee that you'll be let alone at least for now. I don't know what I want you to do. You were invited up there for dinner tomorrow?"

"Yes."

"Well, I asked Betty—nice kid by the way—to stick to that bid. The family'll be huddling together anyhow. Go up. And just *see* whatever there is to see—see and hear. All right?"

"I'll do it," Jerry said after a moment, "but you can't expect me to be unprejudiced. If some-

body killed those three men it was undoubtedly somebody outside the family. And as for Betty . . ."

Riley stood up. His face was troubled and at the same time paternal. "I never get used to the things people do. And in my business, you see a good many of the worst ones. I can't even understand why a bird like you falls for one of those Park Avenue debs."

"It just happened."

"Sure. I suppose so. Anyway, I must say she's better than the run-of-the-mill heiress. I probably ought to congratulate you." He chuckled. "Maybe I envy you." He picked up his hat. "By the way, who's Holly Barker?"

Jerry smiled slightly. "Do you know everything?"

"Everything I can find out."

"Holly is another artist. We went to the Art Students' League together five years ago. I've known her ever since. She's a hell of a good gal."

"You aren't two-timing the Stanton girl by any chance?"

"Good Lord, no. Holly's around here a lot but she's—why, she's practically a sister."

"I get it." Jerry followed Riley to the door. The detective held out his hand. "I'll be over late tomorrow night. Around one o'clock, I'd say."

"All right."

"Lousy weather, isn't it?"

"I'll say it is."

The detective sauntered toward the elevator. Jerry closed his door. He walked to the window of his studio and looked out. The trees in the courtyard below were limp. Lights were going on in the wing of the building that faced his rooms. The heavy slowly scattering clouds bore the last dun hues of the setting sun. Jerry felt sick and weak. He spun the tassel on the window curtain and tried to think.

If they had all been killed it could only have been by poison. There was no other possibility. He had seen two of them die. He thought of the book Holly had brought to his apartment and he started to look for it.

It was gone.

VI

Riley must have taken it—smuggled it out. Jerry wondered frantically if that book, so innocently purchased, would someday be the necessary evidence to convict its innocent possessor.

It was eight o'clock and Jerry was still sitting in his studio when the phone rang.

"This is Riley."

For an instant, he couldn't think who Riley was. But the voice had registered on his mind. "Oh. Yes."

"I'm assuming that I didn't need to tell you that our conversation this afternoon was strictly on the q.t."

"I haven't seen anybody since. And I wouldn't talk about it anyway—of course."

"Right. We've just had a preliminary report from the Medical

Examiner. It doesn't get us anywhere at all. There was nothing the matter with the guy's heart—but the guy had heart failure. Of course something may come to light before they're finished. I have a hunch it may not. But regardless of whether or not they find anything I'm going ahead quietly. They've gone over him inch-by-inch with magnifying glasses. There isn't a puncture on his skin—not a spot."

"What does that mean?" Jerry asked agitatedly.

"You tell me. I don't know. If somebody didn't slip him poison in his food, if he wasn't pricked or stabbed with something poisonous, but if he was poisoned nevertheless—"

"Maybe it was something he breathed."

"Maybe. I just wanted you to know so that when you go up there tomorrow night you'll watch for any kind of a lead—any kind. For the time being we're giving out to the papers that he died of natural causes. The family is getting the same story. Meanwhile we're checking up about ten thousand necessary details." And with that the detective hung up.

Jerry had been feeling for hours that Riley, in spite of his pretense of friendliness, had actually been trying to trip him. He did not relish that feeling. He did not relish the idea of becoming a sort of spy in Betty's home. But there was no way to avoid that—and Riley had seemed likeable. Over the phone now he sounded friendly.

Jerry decided to investigate one source of his multiple anxieties. "You took my book."

"Yeah," Riley replied easily. "I was wondering if you'd notice that. What were you doing with it anyway?"

It was only then that he realized telling the truth would involve Holly. He hesitated and decided the exact truth at all times would be best. "Well, after John and Paul Stanton died that girl you spoke about—Holly Parker—suggested it might be poison. We sort of kidded about it and the next day she brought over the book."

"I told the chief it was probably something like that. Will Miss Parker be able to prove where and when she bought it?"

"Search me."

Riley laughed. "It's a lucky thing they assigned me to look into your particular activities, Jenks. There are plenty of fellows down here at headquarters who would have you behind bars by now. Well—see you tomorrow night. If the Parker girl hasn't anything to do you might invite her in. I'd like to have a look at her. And she seems to know more about what you're doing than you do yourself."

"I'll ask her."

"So long."

Jerry went back to the window. It was dark now.

After dinner the next evening, with half a dozen other fatigued

Villagers, he stepped from the last bus downtown and walked across Washington Square to Waverly Place. Holly was waiting for him. Together they went up to his apartment. Riley was sitting there. He didn't explain how he had gotten in. He hadn't explained before.

His attention was concentrated on Holly, and a detached person watching the detective might easily have deduced that what he saw further relieved his mind. After a moment of introductions and general conversation Riley became relaxed and affable. Holly obviously liked him from the first. And he was indeed more like a friend—a shrewd detached friend —than a detective. Jerry surely hoped he'd prove to be a friend.

They all sat down. And they lighted cigarettes before Riley said, "You look as if you'd spent a bad evening, Jerry."

"I did."

"How were the Stantons?"

"What would you expect? They've been told Frank died naturally. But every one of them knew he was in perfect health. They suspect they're being kidded by the police. I understand you spent the morning up there."

Riley grinned. "I don't believe I told them my name."

Jerry's answering grin was very slight. "The description they gave fitted. What did you make of it?"

Riley chuckled.

Holly said, "Why, Jerry, you can't ask an officer of the law that question! He wants to know what *you* saw."

"Well—not much. I can't really say I saw anything. Betty was all broken up and I felt so darned badly about it that most of the time I just moped around her. Still—well, look! I might as well give you the whole thing in a job lot. I don't believe any of them did anything. Or the servants either. But when your assignment is to be suspicious, apparently you suspect everybody you see."

He rubbed his face with his hands. Riley prompted him. "As for instance?"

"As for instance the butler—Haynes. He was as nervous as a cat all evening and he isn't the type that gets jittery easily either. Cold as a dead fish. But tonight when he announced me in the drawing room, he said 'Mr. Jenky Jares' or something like that—messed my name up.

"At dinner he fumbled a plate and tried to grab it and knocked it halfway across the room. After dinner Betty's maid served coffee because Haynes had gone to bed with a headache. Well? That's Haynes. If you can assume that he had a chance to poison all three of them . . ."

"We can assume it for the time being," Riley said offhandedly, "since we don't know how the poison was given—if poison was given at all—or whether the servants have good alibis. All the others say they were in bed the morning John was killed—or died.

But they can't prove it. They don't seem to remember what they were doing the day Paul made his last speech.

"And yesterday"—he thought a moment—"Betty was in the dentist's office, Leslie says he was home alone in his apartment, Maude was driving her own car—shopping, she says—and Molly was in a movie. Haynes was taking his afternoon off and says he was riding on a ferry boat to get cool, which, God knows, he may have been doing. Marcel, that dizzy frog chef, maintains he was in the garden for four hours but he can't prove it.

"Sometimes people have good alibis and sometimes they don't. Sometimes a good alibi is more suspicious than a bad one. Proving an alibi is about the easiest and oldest dodge a deliberate murderer ever uses. Personally I don't pay much attention to them. If somebody gets bumped off I just assume for the sake of argument that everybody who might have done it could have been on the spot—whether it looks like it or not.

"Of course, if somebody can prove, say, that he was locked up in a bank vault or that she was clamped to a permanent-wave machine, I'm willing to rule that person out more or less. But this gang is hazy in the first place and snooty in the second. They resent questions and they don't have good memories." He wiggled his thumb at Jerry. "Go ahead. Shoot."

"Well, we went in to dinner like a bunch of mummies. Nobody ate much. It even occurred to me that they were scared to eat. Maybe you told them that Frank's death was natural but they all have a pretty good idea it wasn't. The feeling that swallowing a spoonful of soup may result in laying you low isn't a comfortable one. I had it myself up there."

"Did they talk about it?"

"Not directly. Maude did say that they were all behaving foolishly. She tried to cheer them up. At least to make them talk about something. For a couple of courses she gave everything a whirl from the weather to the World Series. Finally she said that in her opinion the doctors would probably discover nothing unpleasant and everybody could carry on. That's as close as they ever came to mentioning what they felt."

Riley nodded. "Maude was the only one who was really decent to me this morning. She seems like a pretty level dame."

"Yes." Jerry paused. "What did you make out of Molly Stanton?"

Riley smiled. "What did you? She was just this side of hysterics when I saw her. Of course I told her what I told everybody—in a sudden and unexplainable death the M.E. and the police have to ask a few questions — but she seemed so upset that I didn't push anything very far."

"She wasn't upset tonight," Jerry said. "At least she wasn't hysterical. She was very quiet. She didn't pay much attention to what anybody said. All through the meal she had a faraway look in her eyes. I thought at first that maybe she was cracking up, losing her senses. But the more I watched her the less I believed that. She's got something on her mind that nobody else in the family knows about. It's something big and absorbing and it isn't grief over Frank's death."

"No kidding?" Riley drummed on the arm of his chair. "That's something I didn't get a slant on. I'll have to see what Molly Stanton's tail reports."

"Tail?"

"Sure. Everybody in the family is being tailed, including your Betty. All right. Molly has something on her mind. What about Leslie?"

Jerry leaned forward and frowned. "You saw him this morning. Was he pale? Shaking? Scared to death? Did he say anything about planning to go away?"

"Go away?"

"Right. Just as soon as Frank's funeral is over. Somebody from a travel agency called him up during dinner. I heard him say over the phone that he didn't care where just so long as it was a good ship and a restful voyage. He told us that he was planning to take a cruise because he had been through about as much as he could stand.

"Maude argued with him. Said it was no time to desert the family. Said she didn't want to go on a cruise this summer—things being the way they were. But he kept insisting with a sort of tormented determination. I can tell you for a fact that Les Stanton is scared of something, plenty scared."

Riley's voice was dry. "I got that when I talked to him."

"And another thing." Jerry halted uncomfortably. "I mean—when you get suspicious it does peculiar things to your brain. But look—I take it you're going on the assumption Frank was poisoned. Presumably Paul and John were also. It must have been a pretty clever job."

"It was—maybe too clever."

"So think of this. Leslie Stanton is an engineer—a *chemical* engineer."

"I already have thought of it." Riley was grinning. "And it's something to think about. But I I should have told you kids the final report from the medical department."

Jerry unconsciously stood up. "What was it?"

Riley made a rueful gesture. "A complete blank."

"They didn't find *anything?*"

"Not a thing."

"Then," Jerry asked, "why do the police go ahead?"

"Several reasons. Three brothers don't die of heart failure in a row when one had a fairly good heart, another a sound heart and the third had just been checked

by a first-rate doctor. That's one thing. Another is that every time a Stanton dies a good many people benefit largely and directly. A third is that the newspapers are going to town on the story. And we're not entirely licked."

He studied them as if he were pondering whether or not to say what was on his mind. "Assuming they were killed, I can't see any other method than by poison. There are several poisons that don't show up in an autopsy. If they were murdered and their murderer used one of those poisons I'd have a pretty good case if I could even prove the existence of such a poison in the house or in anybody's house."

"What kind of poisons work that way?" Jerry asked.

The detective turned to Holly and his eyes twinkled. "You ought to know, Holly, if you read that book I swiped. The most effective one would be aconite, I think."

A similar gleam came in Holly's eyes. "Wouldn't *aconitine* be better?"

He laughed. "It would. A few drops in the bloodstream are enough. It's quick—it's sure—and your autopsy shows nothing. Just the regular post mortem picture of suffocation due to heart failure."

"Can you buy aconite or aconitine without a prescription?" she asked.

"Lord, no!"

"Then can't you trace who bought it?" She spoke agitatedly.

Riley yawned and stretched. "It seems to be a general belief that if somebody is poisoned all the homicide squad has to do is find the phony prescription. That presumably leads directly to the guilty person. 'Trace the poison' is just like *cherchez la femme* in the public mind.

"Now, no kidding, is that sensible? Suppose you, Holly, want to put something in Jerry's coffee. Are you going to get a prescription and buy it at a pharmacy? Would you be that stupid? You would not! You'd figure out what poison would do the job" — He grinned — "maybe even buy a book on poisons first. Then what would you do?

"Within fifty miles of this very spot there are literally hundreds of one-man drugstores. Hundreds of places where a single druggist is on duty alone. You could walk into one or sneak into one. While the druggist was busy—making a milk shake or out in the street looking at an accident—you could easily step into his little back room, help yourself to enough poison to knock over a regiment and sneak out. Or maybe even buy a magazine or some aspirin as you left."

"I never thought of that," Jerry said slowly.

Riley yawned again. "No? But lots of other people have. Why, hell, I'd lay you ten dollars to ten cents that I could go out of this apartment for an hour and come back with a bottle of almost anything you could name. It's a

cinch. It's such a cinch that it's a wonder the mother-in-law mortality isn't ten times as high as it is.

"The dumbest shop-lifter could swipe a bottle of aconite. And yet, if this story breaks in the newspapers, they'll be screaming at us to trace the poison. If somebody bought it—we could. If somebody swiped it—we might just as well try to trace a bumble bee by the trail he leaves in the air. For that matter . . ." He shrugged.

"For that matter what?" Jerry asked.

"For that matter, if it was aconite or aconitine, anybody who knew how could make the stuff out of plants. Aconite comes from the roots of monkshood or wolfbane. You can grow them in your garden. Aconitine is merely a sort of super-essence of it. Our friend Leslie could have extracted the stuff, for instance. What's the matter with you?"

Jerry was staring at the detective. When he spoke his voice was hoarse. "Matter? *Plenty!* I forgot to tell you one thing. After dinner Betty and I went out in the garden. That chef was fooling around there. He usually is. Come to think of it, though, people don't do gardening at night! And he didn't seem to be any too pleased that we had come out there and found him."

"What was he doing?"

"He said something about transplanting some stuff. Anyway he was pulling up a whole lot of flowers."

"*Pulling* them up?"

Holly broke in. "You don't pull up things you're going to transplant. You dig them. And you don't transplant things this time of year, anyway."

Riley was already at the telephone, dialing furiously. When he got his number he gave his name and asked for Willis. His voice was quick and commanding. "Oh, Willis. Riley! This evening the Stanton chef pulled up a lot of plants in the garden. Yeah, plants. See if you can get them.

"I don't want anybody up there to know you're working on that angle. Sure. They might be lying in a pile or in a basket somewhere. You might look in the furnace in the cellar. If you find anything newly burned—bring the ashes. That's it. Yep. Check."

He turned around and looked at Jerry. "I had a hunch yesterday that it wouldn't do any harm to send you up there for dinner tonight. If we don't find wolfbane or monkshood in that bunch of plants I'll be surprised. That is—if we find the plants. I'll see you tomorrow and thanks a lot—an awful lot."

He was gone.

VII

After Riley had left Jerry took Holly to the drugstore on the corner. They were quite excited. "I'll bet," she whispered to him over a frosted chocolate, "they

find that Frenchman has a roomful of different poisons he made from his plants. I'll bet they also find he owed a lot of money—or needed a lot desperately for some reason. Maybe a woman. He knew he'd get it if any of the Stantons died—so he did it."

Jerry shrugged. But it was not an especially convincing shrug. He more than half believed that theory himself. Artists have never been known as cold logicians. And he was no exception. He lived by impulses—good impulses, generally well controlled—but impulses nevertheless. A coldly logical person would never have allowed himself to fall in love with a girl as remote socially as Betty was from himself. He shrugged, therefore, and said, "Maybe."

Her eyes shone. "And the police will owe the whole thing to you. Imagine! Imagine what the papers will say—'Shrewd Observation of Young Artist Leads to Conviction of Murderer!' "

"I hate to wish anybody hard luck," he answered in an effort to seem modest. "But if he's the guy —I hope they get him."

"Me too. It *is* exciting—even if it's terrifying! Just think, for example, what Riley was saying about drug stores. And we're *in* one!"

She looked around—at the bottles of perfume, the magazine rack, the candy counter, the soda fountain, back toward the cubbyhole where prescriptions were compounded. "I've always thought of drug stores as pretty prosaic places. But Riley's right! Why—even I could sneak in there and help myself to anything I pleased!"

She shuddered ecstatically.

Jerry grinned and answered, "Tomorrow will tell." He tried to sound nonchalant. But there was a quiver in his voice.

He was mistaken.

He stayed all day in his apartment—and nothing happened. No one called. There was no news from Riley.

The next day was the same. He bought every paper and found no hint of new developments. He telephoned twice to the Stanton home but Haynes told him Betty was not there. Both times he left messages for her to call but for some reason she did not. He tried to work but that was useless. He walked over to Holly's apartment but only her roommate was there —a mousy girl for whom he did not particularly care.

By ten o'clock that evening he was desperate. He had decided to go to Police Headquarters and try to find Riley when there was a knock on the door—and Riley came in. A very dejected Riley indeed.

"I've gone three quarters out of my mind," Jerry said, "wondering what the news was."

"And in the same time," the detective answered, dropping into a chair, "I've gone completely out of mine. About this time last night I thought you were one bright

boy. They got those plants—every damn one that Frenchman pulled up. And by the way he isn't French. Alsatian, or something of the sort.

"Well—the plants were as predicted. Monkshood and wolfbane and hellebore. Deadly nightshade and purple foxglove. The works. Enough poison could have been brewed out of the mess to knock over a small town. Well—enough, anyhow. You can see how I felt."

Jerry's eyes were wide. "You bet I can!"

"We got the chef all right, too. Took him to Headquarters yesterday morning. And this was his story. He raised herbs and spices for his kitchen — which he's famous for doing—and those poisonous flowers for fun. Some of them are common in many gardens. Some aren't. It amused him, he said, to see what decent-looking flowers had such indecent characteristics.

"Obviously he was a crackpot. a morbid bird anyhow. He said he was poetic. Said all chefs are poets. Well, next we asked him why he was pulling up his little garden on that particular night. Because this morning there wasn't a harmful plant in the whole place. And he had a pretty good answer."

Riley paused to light a cigar. Jerry asked, "Where'd you find the stuff by the way?"

"It was easy. He left out two ashcans full of dead shrubs and flowers for the D.S.C. to pick up in the morning. He didn't think we'd be on to him so quickly. Nobody had ever paid much attention to his posies. A good thing too. Well, he said that the deaths of the three brothers and especially the way they died made him think that perhaps they had been poisoned.

"That scared him because he had a gardenful of poison—and it was possible that if the Stantons *had* been poisoned it might have been by a kind of drug he grew for amusement. So he pulled them up to get them out of the way. That was his story—and he's stuck to it for thirty-six hours."

"Maybe he'll break down."

Riley gazed at Jerry sympathetically. "It's important for us to figure this thing out," he said slowly. "When things are important we work hard. Very few people hold out for thirty-six hours—unless they're innocent."

"You mean you used the third degree?"

Riley lifted a shoulder. "Depends. There was a bright light and the boys shouting. And he was allowed to get pretty thirsty. We didn't rubber hose him. We don't—in my department. Nope. He acted straight. I'll say that."

"Did you search his rooms?"

"Search? Son, that's the wrong word. We put a microscope on that guy's whole life—and not a thing turned up. He had a good war record—a beaut. He has about eleven thousand dollars tucked away in banks and in

bonds. He has a wife and two kids in Astoria—all of which the Stantons knew, of course. He has written a little book in French about cooking sea food that's supposed to be tops on the subject.

"His friends are other chefs and a Columbia professor, who is an authority on herbs, and a few Frenchmen he plays cards with. Everybody gave him a clean bill. Wife's nice—kids bright and progressive as sin. Wish my own did as well. No sir, I'd be ready to swear Marcel's as innocent as I think you are. How do you like that?"

Jerry thought for awhile. "What did you do with him?"

"Turned him loose. Nothing else to do."

"Could you have gotten aconite or aconitine, for example, from those plants?"

"You bet—if you knew how. It's something of a trick, chemically, to produce pure stuff."

"Then someone else could have used Marcel's garden."

"Sure. But who? How do we prove it? The answer is, Jerry, my boy, we don't. The Medical Examiner wouldn't play with us any longer. The certificate says 'natural causes.' The funeral is going to be in two days—and a quiet one. I've had cases like this before—plenty of them. I hate 'em—but there they are. Maybe the guy did die naturally. Shock following shock topped off by the dentist's chair. He hated dentists. Could be. And we haven't got a thing."

"*You* don't believe it was natural."

Riley chewed hard on his cigar. "We get plenty of dead bodies with murder written all over them—and catch nobody. There are far more that we never get. Somebody kills them and they're marked 'natural causes' and buried. I don't mind telling you that this business is hard to bear because I hoped to be an inspector soon and the papers are making that 'soon' pretty unlikely.

"I've seen everybody I can think of. Done everything I can think of. Asked every question that has popped into my mind. Even held you in partial candidacy till now. And now—we have no evidence, no body even, no chief suspect. I guess the guy *must* have corked off!"

"You aren't going to close the case?" Jerry asked with astonishment.

Riley spread his large hands. "There was never a case. We won't forget what happened—if that's what you mean. But while I've been wasting my inadequate talents on the Stantons other people in other parts of town have been going haywire. There's a stack of stuff on my desk. There are three or four assignments the Chief wants me to start on. I came down here to say so long" He smoked a moment and stood. "Like to see you again—but people like me haven't very

much opportunity to fool around."

Jerry shook his hand. They went to the door. In the hall the detective turned. "Look," he said. "I told the old lady I'd met you. She's noticed your name in some magazine. Say, if you happen to have one of those drawings you don't want to keep—I mean after it's been printed—would you—that is—she'd about burst with pride—if you see what I mean?"

Jerry realized that he had found his first true fan. "I'll send her one—one I was doing last week—as soon as it's returned."

"Elegant," said Riley. "Swell! She made me promise to ask. It's just twenty-two East Belliman Street, Brooklyn. Well . . ."

He was gone.

Jerry sat down alone in his studio. He couldn't believe it. All over, abandoned, nothing. Three men were dead—probably murdered—and nobody would try to find out any more about it. He wondered for a moment if money had silenced the inquiry. He decided that that was impossible. People like Riley, for example, were not for sale.

He went to bed at one o'clock—but it took him a long time to go to sleep. He felt deflated—disappointed almost. He had lived for a short time in a very unreal but extravagantly exciting world. Now the doors of that world were closed.

In the morning, he reflected, he ought really to go up to see Mr. Peck at the *Woman's Review*.

But he did not go that morning. When he rose there was a letter waiting in front of his door—a letter from Betty. She wrote:

Dear Jerry,

When you receive this I shall have left for Newport. We have decided to go to our place there—although summer is about ended. The whole family is coming up. We all feel we want to be together and we want rest and privacy. It's been terrible for all of us, of course. I feel for myself that I want time alone to think.

So I'm asking you not to come up—at least unless I write again. All that has happened has changed me somehow. The love I thought I had for you seemed all-important ten days ago. Now in the face of everything it seems sometimes strangely trivial. Please don't be angry with me. I just want to get to understand that. And please don't try to see me till I do. Good-bye.

Betty.

He read the note and read it over. Still standing in his hall, he tried reading it out loud. It continued to say the same incomprehensible things—in the same unfamiliar tone. He closed his door and carried the letter into his bedroom. He sat down on the bed and read it once more. Tears filled his eyes.

He thought he ought to rush to her at once. He thought the strain of the past days had been

too much for her nature. Then bitterness crept into his mind and sullied it. Maybe the vast changes in her fortune had changed her personality. Maybe she felt free and no longer wanted him. Maybe she had used him only as a way of tormenting her brothers—as a tangible rebellion. At that stage, he cursed all women for being fickle and faithless. He cursed them with the aching savagery of a young man disillusioned in his first consuming love.

In that short hour he became a cynic. He would face the world and hide his hurt. By and by he dressed. He would work. Paint his head off. Someday she would see his masterpieces everywhere. In museums. She would remember. She would be saddened. She would regret.

And when he reached that decision he decided also to have some breakfast. He went to the restaurant where Holly usually ate and she was there. He said to her with cynical bluntness, "You look like sin this morning."

And Holly answered with the wanton perspicuity of womankind, "What's the matter? Fight with Betty?"

Then he sat down and told her everything. . . .

For three weeks he did work. Three long, arduous weeks.

Mr. Peck saw to that. He worked bitterly but successfully. The serial became his to illustrate. But in the same period his cynicism gradually thawed. He began to long for Betty. To recall scores of precious moments they had spent together. Kisses—promises—smiles shared. He grew to believe that the shock of those tragic August days had temporarily unbalanced her. He hit upon the idea that he was entitled to one last interview with her, whatever its consequences might be.

Thus, when his cynicism had thoroughly ebbed and his love had largely returned, he came to the day when it became obvious he must go.

VIII

It was a beautiful blue and golden day in early September. He packed a bag and took the train with elation.

Newport was magnificent.

The entrance to the Stanton estate, although forbidding, made his heart beat happily. His cab wound through a quarter mile of trees and shrubbery and he came upon Betty before he reached the house.

She and Molly and Leslie and Maude were playing darts in what was meant to be a badminton court. When the cab stopped, they halted the game and Betty came toward him slowly. A changed Betty—a Betty who used careful politeness to hide whatever her feelings were.

"Why—Jerry! Hello! This is a surprise! You know everybody. We're playing darts. Come on!"

"What'll I do with my things?"

"Things?" Betty asked him.

He was disconcerted—but he tried to grin. "Aren't you going to ask me to spend the night?"

"Well, as a matter of fact . . ." She looked at the others and then changed her mind. "Why, of course—do! Have the driver deliver them to Haynes at the house. And join us here. I'll find you a room when we're through."

So he found himself playing darts with them under a benevolent sky in the midst of a vast and exquisite lawn. Only Betty seemed changed. Maude accepted his arrival pleasantly. Les was quite genial. "After all we've been through, old man—*great!*" And Molly, as usual, didn't seem to notice the addition to their party.

Betty repeated, "This *is* a surprise!" She gave him darts with orange feathers. "Leslie's champion," she said, "and Maude's runner-up. Let's see what you can do! Stand here. How are things in town?"

He said they were fine. The tone of his welcome had disconcerted him. He had expected to be taken for a long and private walk by Betty. Now—he had to throw darts.

Jerry's manual skill was considerable. He hefted his dart and threw a bull's-eye. Then another. Maude was delighted. The game continued for a considerable time.

Then Betty suggested a swim.

The Stantons had a pool. Molly refused to swim but Leslie and his wife joined them. After the swim there were cocktails—an innovation in the Stanton family. After cocktails they sat around, trying to talk. Ordinarily they would have dressed. But Jerry had neglected to bring his dinner clothes. When dinner was finally served he discovered that Marcel still prepared the Stanton food. And he learned very little else.

Some people came in for bridge after that.

It was past ten o'clock when Betty suggested that Jerry might like to take a stroll with her. At that his spirits bounded.

They went out into the evening together. As always before, he felt the nearness of her, and her loveliness. He was on the verge of trying to take her in his arms when she said rather flatly, "You got my note, of course?"

"Yes. And obeyed it—till now."

"Jerry. You shouldn't have come."

"Why—darling?"

She walked a step from him and stood still. "It's hard to explain—if you don't understand. Impossible, I guess. But after Frank died—after all that—I just wasn't the same. Even about you. I felt as if I could never love anyone—with that dreadful shadow in my life. Don't you see even a little?"

And abruptly he did see—or at least he thought he saw. Betty believed her brothers had been

murdered. She believed the murderer was still unpunished. She could not feel free to love or even to live while the assassin, whoever it was, went unknown and unpunished. That was like Betty as he had always pictured her! That made the tone of her wounding note not cold—but pitiful.

When he answered, his voice shook. "Sure. I do see—now, Betty!"

She turned hopefully. Her eyes shone strangely. "Then—you'll go away tomorrow? And you won't come back? Because it only makes me unhappy!"

He swallowed. He had expected a torrent of confidences. But she was too proud and too brave to divide her wretchedness even with him. Well, he would go away. But he would not rest now until the case which Riley had abandoned was laid bare to the light of day. He would do something—anything—to take the burden from the shoulders of the girl at his side.

He spoke gravely. "Yes. I'll go. But I love you, Betty. I can't bear to let you stay this way. I won't."

She didn't speak.

So he said sturdily and gallantly, "Shall we go back?"

"Yes—please let's."

It was when they reached the broad brick terrace which served as a porch for the mansion that the idea came to him. He was startled by its simplicity—astonished that no one had thought of it. It meant he would have to work fast. But it could be done. The thing amazed him. As Betty went through the door he said softly, "In fact, dear, I think I can promise to remove that shadow."

She looked at him queerly and walked toward her guests in the card room.

Jerry refused to play. He wanted to perfect his plan. It was psychological in essence. The Stantons had not seen him for some time. They could not know what he had been doing. He would find some little chance to tell each of them alone that he knew the truth about the murder. Then he would leave.

Thereafter Riley could arrange to have all the Stantons—and Haynes and Marcel—carefully watched. The first one to make a break would be caught. He would put his threat in such a way that the guilty person would be sure to make some kind of significant move.

It was eleven o'clock. He had at best only twelve hours. And yet he managed.

Haynes was first. He found Haynes alone in the hall, tinkering with a lampshade. "I don't suppose you ever knew," Jerry began, "that I've been closely connected with the police?"

Haynes certainly started. "What, sir?"

"Just that, Haynes. And the police know everything. I'm tell-

ing you—simply because I've just fought with the Chief. I want to spoil the plans he has made for next Monday."

Jerry went away, leaving Haynes shaken.

The pretext of wanting a glass of milk brought him in touch with Marcel. He led up gradually to the point at which he said, "The police know, Marcel, where the stuff was made and by whom. I needn't say what stuff I mean—and I'll skip my reasons for telling you this."

The news reduced Marcel's face to ashes.

Maude he found pouring a drink at a sideboard while she was dummy. He explained that he had been connected with the police and she laughed. "Good heavens! How exciting!"

He stared at her. "I hate to have shame brought on this family," he continued gravely. "But in my official capacity I know enough about one member to bring shame on all of them."

Maude stared and spilled her highball. And Maude was the most composed of all.

When, in the upstairs hall he found Les that night and when he had made his fateful implication, he was afraid that Les was going to faint. But he didn't. He just staggered and finally whispered, "What has to be—has to be, I suppose!"

Molly turned gray and wiped her lips. She had been first down to breakfast—except for Jerry.

And when the chauffeur drove Jerry to his train he left behind him a stricken family. Their reactions had been so violent, in fact, that Jerry wondered if it weren't possible they all knew the truth—and if whatever had happened was not the result of conspiracy.

He was impatient to get back to New York—impatient to tell Riley what he had done. He was positive his stratagem would result in action of some sort—overt action—an attempt at escape—a signed confession.

Even a suicide.

He had not thought of that. It disconcerted him. Riley wouldn't approve of a suicide. Maybe it would be better to wait awhile before telling Riley—to see what happened first. Possibly he could find some way of checking up on the comings and goings of the Stantons and their servants without informing Riley. Then—when somebody departed, he could tell—and the police could take up the trail. That wasn't perfect, either.

The closer he came to New York the more perturbed he became. He decided to talk it over with Holly before he went any further.

The recklessness of what he had done seemed thoroughly appalling by the time his cab drew up in front of his own door. If, for instance, no one was guilty and someone nevertheless became

so frightened he or she did something rash—the entire responsibility for the deed would be his.

Being an artist he thought in pictures and seldom from cause to effect. That characteristic came near to undoing him. Ultimately it saved him. But on the day of his return from Newport he was approaching panic. He could see the Stantons in various dire situations—all the result of his mad idea.

He dropped his suitcase and called Holly. Nobody answered her phone. He sat down and tried to think. He had been impelled to his drastic effort by sympathy for Betty—by an urge to remove the incubus which was wrecking her life. His own motive was clearly altruistic. Even, he reflected, if he had known that he would never see her again, he would undoubtedly have proceeded with his dubious scheme for her benefit. But now the likelihood of smoking out the guilty person with no further complications seemed to be less. Anything could happen.

When Holly did call—on the chance that he had returned—he made no effort to hide his feelings. "Come over here right away! I've done something terrible!"

She came. Her very appearance was comforting. She was wearing slacks and her heavy hair dropping occasionally over her dark blue eyes made her toss her head in an old and familiar way. Holly was solid stuff. She sat and listened without interrupting.

But as she listened something happened to Holly. The sturdy youthfulness inherent in her was gradually shattered. She began to grow anxious. She lighted a cigarette and walked around the room. She shot quick expectant glances at him. Her behavior brought back his anxiety.

He finished as quickly as he could. "So I told them all—in different ways. I let Marcel and Haynes think I was doing it because I had quarreled with the police. I intimated to the various members of the family that I was telling them to prevent further scandal."

Holly gulped. "You told—everybody?"

"Haynes — Marcel — Maude — Les — Molly."

"But not *Betty?*"

He jumped. "Betty! Lord, no!"

"Didn't it ever occur to you that she had the same motives you did—at least insofar as John and Paul were concerned?" She hesitated and watched him closely. "As for Frank—maybe he found out too much—so that was why he died. Frank was the nicest of the three.

"Then look at all the money that came to her. And finally—she was with Frank when it happened—and for all you know she could have been up early on the morning John died. She knew where Paul was going to speak

and probably saw him before he left. She—"

Jerry was shaking his head. "It couldn't have been Betty—"

Holly put out her cigarette and then lighted another immediately. "I hope," she said slowly, "I hope with all my heart it wasn't anybody in the family! Or Marcel. Or Haynes. I hope—they just died!"

"Why?" He sounded dull and uncomprehending.

She turned to face him—quickly and almost angrily. "Because, you idiot, don't you see what you've done? Can't you think *at all!* If one of those people to whom you gave that little message of yours really is a murderer—is that person going to run away? Hardly! He—or she—feels safe. There's no evidence. All three of the dead men have been cremated. The only real threat now—is *you!*"

He felt as if he had been struck in the pit of the stomach. He knew his scalp tingled—but it was a second before he realized that his hair was slowly rising. His eyes bulged.

Holly went on talking. "If you happened to connect with a guilty individual he'll know the police aren't after him. Because when the police have something to act on—boy, they *act!* He'll think, though, that you have gotten on to something he forgot or overlooked."

She bent toward him. "Jerry! Do you realize what a spot you're in? Do you remember that those three men died in the midst of crowds—and in a dentist's private office—with people all around? Dropped dead! And they were autopsied—or one was—and the medical examiner himself couldn't prove anything. Don't you see that whatever was done—if anything was—was fearfully clever? And if the person who killed those three—supposing they were killed—wants now to kill you—it would be a cinch!"

He nodded. He was breathing heavily. "Yeah."

"Where'd you ever get a cockeyed idea like that, anyhow!"

"It just came to me."

"Maybe you read it. Maybe cops do do things like that sometimes. But cops are in that business. They know how to protect themselves. What are we going to do?"

"Tell Riley right away!"

She paused. "Maybe that would be a good idea. I'll get him on the phone."

And she did. "This is Holly Parker," she said. "And my boyfriend has just done something dreadfully dumb." There was a pause. "Yes, I know you've been called off the Stanton business. But listen . . ." She talked swiftly and earnestly. When she had finished she listened awhile. Then she hung up. Her hand was shaking. She looked as if she were going to burst into tears.

"Is he coming right away?" Jerry asked feebly.

"Not coming at all, Jerry. He said that in the first place he had come to believe the three Stantons just died. In the second he said you had no business to pull a gag like that. He gave me the devil on your account. Said, think of what you'd done to the people who were innocent. And he said finally, that whatever the Stanton business was, it was too fancy for the police. He told me —Jerry, he laughed and told me that if you dropped dead playing pinball in a drug store he'd believe in the murder theory again and re-open the case!"

He stared at her pallidly and said nothing.

That was the beginning of the worst two days in Jerry's life. They would have been bad days in the life of any man, however adventurous, however accustomed to danger.

Because he did not know, in the first place, whether or not he was in any danger.

In the second place, there was no way of guessing the nature of his peril—if indeed there were peril. A man who expects to be shot can stay under cover. A man afraid of being poisoned can select his own food. But a man afraid of sudden and agonizing death that comes mysteriously—in a crowd or in the privacy of an office—in a public railroad station even—has no means of protecting himself.

The first day he stayed in. Holly went out and bought his food—eggs and things in cans. On the second day his apartment began to seem a more lethal region than the street. He went walking alone—because Holly was compelled to do some work.

He strolled up Fifth Avenue in the bright sunlight. He sat for a little while near the Library lions. He came downtown on Sixth—walking all the way. And all the time, in the heart of the familiar city, he felt that death might come suddenly upon him.

He was so badly frightened that he was barely able to get back into his house. When he unlocked his own door he swung it open, stepped back and ducked. No one was there. Nothing happened.

"I can't go out," he told Holly that evening. "I can't stand it. When a car backfired beside me today I had to hang onto a lamppost for five minutes to pull myself together. A man popped out from behind an elevated pillar down by Twenty-third Street. I thought he was popping at me—and I almost socked him before I realized that he hadn't even seen me. It's awful!"

Holly nodded. She pulled down the blinds in the studio. She could readily understand that it was awful. For horror, whether real or imaginary, was stalking him not by night, not in the lonely places but by the blinding light of day and in the tumult of the city. It was a nameless horror—swift, explicit. A deadly horror.

Familiarity with it might make it wear off in time. It might break him down utterly instead. Holly shared some of that incredible feeling. The secret killer they had hypothecated might assume that she also knew whatever he was supposed to know. When she walked the public streets and when she lay down on her bed the fear of death was her constant companion too.

"If we only knew what to expect," she said for the hundredth time. "If we could only guess! I wouldn't mind waiting for bullets —or a stab. I wouldn't mind worrying about my food. But this is so . . . !"

He sighed. "The police gave up. They couldn't find anything. Not a capsule in his stomach—or a wound on his body. Even supposing he had been stuck, by somebody dexterous and accurate, with *any* kind of a weapon that could . . ."

And then he stopped talking. For Jerry's mind had suddenly reeled off a new set of pictures. It had been overworking during the past days, presenting dramatic cinemas of his own collapse and speedy death. But now other scenes flooded his imagination and some inner resource of his mind connected them up—pictures of the darts game he had reluctantly played at Newport and pictures of the three men in the instant before their seizures. Maybe darts were wrong but . . . !

He straggled across the room. He dropped limply into a chair. Holly thought for an instant that *It* had happened. She cried out and ran toward him.

"I've *got* it!" he whispered. "I've got it!"

"Darling!"

"I know how they did it!"

"Oh." Her sanity came back slowly. Her abject fright turned into excitement. "You mean you've figured out—"

Strength was shooting into his veins. "Have I! *I'll* say so! My God—it's the grimmest idea I ever dreamed of! An accident the first time! After that a deliberate scheme! And they'll never prove it now! *Never!* Only if—*hey!* Let's get Riley! He'll believe me! He's got a lot of brains—for a cop! Maybe we can figure out some way . . ."

Holly shook him. "Are you nuts? Or are you going to quit babbling and tell me what you're thinking?"

"Yeah. Get Riley, though."

And he told her.

IX

When Riley came, after much argument, and sat sardonically in the good chair, Jerry talked hard and fast for several minutes. Riley's amused skepticism slowly vanished. He became less a genial Irishman and increasingly a taut scowling vengeful human engine.

When Jerry finished he said, "Kid, I think you've hit it! But

by all the saints and devils—it's a terrifying hunch! Look! If you're right you may be in danger—real danger!"

Jerry was relaxing for the first time in two days. "Sure. But if I'm right I know what not to do."

"Mmm, yeah. Say—how's your nerve?"

"Shot."

"I can believe it! But I'm serious! I want you to do—just what you ought not to do."

"Are you crazy?"

"We'll take precautions. Let's see . . ." Riley's eyes travelled around the room in speculation. "Plate glass—might show." He fastened his gaze on the theatrical masks which Jerry had made long ago and now used to decorate his rooms. "Holy mackerel! Boy—if this comes out, Jenks, I'll nab that inspectorship!"

They went to work.

It didn't "come out" the first night. They tried their experiment at twelve—and again at two. Holly and Jerry alone in the apartment — she peering cautiously from behind the front window blinds and he waiting tremulously in the bedroom.

Nothing happened on the second night.

On the third Riley said, "We'll give it one more whirl. If we draw a blank, then we'll have to quit. I can't waste my life on a trick I think is more rattle-brained every day!"

"I can't stand it much longer either," Jerry replied nervously.

At midnight it failed.

At one Holly made another of her countless verbal reports from the window to the bedroom. "Taxi stopping. Man getting out." A new note crept into her voice. "He's got a violin case!" Jerry waited feverishly. "He's going into the next entry! He just looked up and down the street! Now the cab's driving away. Jerry—do you think . . . ?"

She came quickly into the bedroom. He was sitting on the bed, shaking. His window was wide open. "I don't think. I'll do it again. But get out of the way!"

She stepped back into the hall. He sat still for about ten minutes. Then he muttered, "Time enough?"

She nodded.

Squatting on the bed he made his final preparations and checked them in a hand mirror. He was as white as paper and trembling violently. Holly, watching from the door, could feel her heart hammering painfully. He stood up on his bed. He took off his coat and vest and tossed them across the open window on to a chair.

After that he turned out the bright light in his room, which left burning only a small lamp on the window sill. Next, giving the appearance of casual ease, he stepped down from his bed, walked over toward the window, stood in front of it and stretched. As he walked and as he stood

there, his mouth was open in a wide yawn.

When it came—it was almost nothing—a faint whizz, a soft minute thump.

Holly screamed.

Jerry fell back on the bed, away from the window, and ripped the mask from his face.

From across the courtyard in the wing of the building which faced Jerry's bedroom there came three rapid pistol shots. After that fusillade there was an instant of dead quiet. It seemed as if everybody in the building—everybody in the block—had stopped breathing.

Holly crawled across the room under the window sill on her hands and knees to Jerry's side. "Are you all right? *Jerry!*"

His eyes reassured her.

She reached for the mask.

"Don't touch it," he said.

There was an uproar then—in the courtyard and in the building. Windows were being shoved up. People were shouting.

Holly looked at the mask with hysterical concentration.

It lay on the bed. It had been made of metal—carefully painted by Jerry to duplicate his own cheeks, cheekbones, ears, mouth and jaws. The mouth of the mask was wide open and the teeth bared. But the mouth was not a mere hole. Behind it was a cup of heavy metal — a cup which fitted exactly over the backs of the teeth and which Jerry had taken into his own mouth when he put it on. Thus the cup had held his mouth wide open and the mask itself had given him the appearance of yawning.

For that was what Jerry had realized when he had shouted that he understood the mystery.

On the balcony at the station above John Stanton had been the huge lithographs advertising New England. A good shot, concealed behind the display, could easily have discharged the missile into John's mouth. It would have penetrated the back of his throat.

Paul had been shouting his speech as he faced a row of apartment buildings. Jerry had even remembered that almost his last word had been, "Ahhh." A syllable that had opened his mouth widely. And there were buildings across the street. Hiding places.

Frank had been in the dentist's chair—with his mouth propped wide—on a hot day when undoubtedly the window had been open.

Jerry's habit of thinking in pictures had solved the problem. No doubt the murderer had first intended merely to hit his victim with a missile containing poison. But John's yawn had been an unforeseen opportunity. The wound made by the missile would have been small. Perhaps it had not even bled.

The victim would have felt a twinge of pain and swallowed or coughed. And no doctor would have found the place unless he were looking for it. After that

first lucky opportunity the murderer had waited for — open mouths.

Now Holly stared into the bottom of the cup in the mask, where there was a large wad of absorbent material. "It's wet," she whispered, "and there are little bits of broken glass. Thank heaven he was a good shot! If he had hit your eyes or forehead . . . !"

Jerry was too frightened to say anything.

A minute later Riley burst into the apartment. His face was gray and sweating.

"Are you all right, Jerry?" he yelled.

"Yeah. I caught it in that cup!"

Riley grinned weakly, swayed and flopped on the bed. He patted Jerry's back. He panted, "Thank heaven for that! If she'd missed I'd never have forgiven myself! I guess I wouldn't have been a party to this if I'd really believed it was coming off."

Holly was staring. "*She?*"

Riley had picked up the mask and looked at the fragment of glass and the wet spot. "She's dead. I had to shoot. I was standing in the dark, one flight above her, when she came up the stairs. She took her rifle out of a violin case. It was an old-fashioned German air gun."

He tipped the mask to throw more light into its cup. "She must have made these glass bullets herself. When I saw she was actually going to do it I covered her and called to her to drop her gun. I could see you standing over there. But she shot and turned at me and said as coldly as I ever heard anybody speak, 'It's a repeater.' I didn't wait after that."

Holly had been struggling for words — or a word. Now she found it. Her voice was ghastly. "Betty . . . ?"

Only then did Riley realize they didn't know. "Maude," he answered quietly. "Who else? She was the hunter of the family. A swell shot with a rifle. I don't know." He looked down at the floor, as stunned as they were. "Greed—those millions. Her husband was the poorest of the Stantons. She was a bold extraverted person. Probably she hated the snide and snooty family she had married. Despised her husband's cousins. Maybe she was insane."

Other people were banging on the door now. A policeman came down the hall, calling, "You in there, Captain Riley?"

"Yeah. I got to beat it now, kids." He stood up and looked at Jerry. "All the rest of my life, Jenks, whenever I hear anybody talk about guts, I'll think of you." He started away with the policeman. "I imagine you fellows won't sleep tonight. Want one of my men to keep you company?"

Jerry tried to keep on being brave. "We'll make out all right."

"I'll detail one anyhow. Help keep the reporters in line. And anyway you need a chaperon."

The reporters weren't finished until four. Then Jerry had coffee

sent up from an all-night restaurant. At five it began to grow light. At seven they heard the ebullient voice of a newsboy—"Young artist traps century's cleverest murderess!"

They were almost the very headlines Holly had imagined in a flight of fancy some days before.

At eight the telephone rang. He recognized the voice—a voice frantic and ecstatic. "Darling! It's Betty! Molly just woke me up and told me! I had to call you right away! It's so wonderful! You see, I've thought all this time that *you* had done it. That's why I didn't want to see you—why I acted so funny! I'll get dressed and catch the first train to town! Oh—you don't *know* how relieved I feel!"

Jerry was staring into space. His voice was flat. "Don't bother."

"What?"

"I'll be busy this morning."

"Then let me know the first minute I can see you!"

He hung up. He looked at Holly and his blank expression slowly became angry. "She thought all the time *I* did it! I can't believe it! I must have been crazy! Can you imagine wanting to marry a girl who would go along for weeks actually believing you'd murdered her three brothers? And all the time I thought *we* were both in love."

Holly didn't say anything.

Jerry shook his head. "We'd never have been happy—*never!*"

She walked to the window.

The phone rang again, loudly.

"Oh, Jerry—this is Riley. Can you come down to Headquarters? The Commissioner wants to meet you. And by the way it was aconitine."

"Where did she get it?"

"We'll never know. Possibly swiped it from the laboratory of one of her husband's friends. I've just been talking to her husband, incidentally. He knew it—or suspected it. That's why he was so frightened. Why he wanted to take her away. Les had spent most of the money he inherited from his father and grandfather. His income as an engineer wasn't anywhere near big enough for Maude's ambitions. She had been riding him about it for years.

"Besides, Les was the only member of the family who knew what was behind that woman's good-natured exterior." A chill came in Riley's voice. "You see, Les had gone hunting with her once in Africa. He said a few things about the way she went out to make a kill—well, if I'd seen 'em I'd have gotten a divorce and bodyguard."

Jerry whistled.

"I found out what Molly had on her mind too. She's just announced that she's going back on the stage — producing her own play. With Frank dead and all that dough she realized she could return to the only life she ever cared about. There's another thing. A couple of weeks before John died Maude had engaged

the whole family in conversation about poison. She had plenty of brass! Of course everybody remembered that talk — even Haynes. It's no wonder they were scared of each other.

"And look! Bring that Holly girl along with you when you come! It's none of my business— but I can't see why you looked twice at a pale thin blonde like Betty when all day, every day, you've got nature's own gift to a young man practically sitting in your lap!"

He hung up.

Jerry put down the phone.

Holly was perplexed by his expression. It seemed to be concentrated on her. "What did he say?" she asked. "What makes you look at me like that, Jerry?"

"Something," Jerry replied, "that just simply hadn't crossed my mind until now. Something perfectly obvious. Something that's beginning to make me feel very strange all over, and realize what a fool I've been."

"What are you talking about?"

He stood up. "Remember when I figured out how this was done? Didn't you, in the heat of excitement, call me darling?"

Then she understood his expression. She blushed. "Oh!" she said.

Jerry was beginning to grin. He was becoming his old self for the first time in weeks. "One pace closer, nature's gift," he said enigmatically.

Holly came a step closer and the enigma was solved.

THE SAINT *has an iron-clad policy to bring to its readers nothing but the absolute best in mystery fiction. During the course of six issues we have printed a number of truly great stories, some new and some old, by truly great writers. Now, we are happy to announce that in the next issue we will present one of the best short novels ever written by an author who is second to none in the genre—Leslie Ford.*

For spine-tingling thrills, for gripping suspense, for mystery-cum-intrigue, you will find "The Strangled Witness" well at the top of the chart. Not a word about the plot here—other than that the story takes place in Washington, D.C.—but we know you'll read this one with gusto.

death goes to the post

by . . . Brett Halliday

Michael Shayne lays down a bet at Hialeah—and so manages to make a losing ticket pay off on a corpse.

MICHAEL SHAYNE had to stop abruptly to avoid colliding with the woman who stepped out of the North Miami Avenue pawnshop in front of him. A slow puzzled frown creased his forehead as he stepped back a pace and watched her cross the sidewalk to a waiting beige chromium convertible.

She was a this-side-of-forty blonde, wearing an expensive white silk dress cunningly designed to draw attention to luscious curves and to conceal the fortyish thickness of midsection and hips. She slid under the steering wheel of the convertible and spun away from the curb without looking back. Shayne was irritated, probing his memory for recollection of either the piquant features or the provocative curves, when a shabby sedan pulled away from the curb behind the convertible and unobtrusively followed it up the avenue.

Shayne's frown deepened when he recognized the solid square face of the man in the sedan. It was Benny Retzel, a private operative in the employ of the Mutual Protective Agency: *Divorce Evidence Our Specialty — You Marry 'Em, We Tail 'Em.*

One of the most successful of all fictional detectives is the rough, tough Michael Shayne. While other private eyes rise and fall, Shayne just keeps on solving gory charivaris—and cutting himself relentlessly in at the payoff, still somehow seeing that the guilty are punished and justice is done.

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Shayne entered the pawnshop and said to its wizened owner, "A dame just bumped into me coming out."

"And such a one!" The proprietor's hands made appropriate gestures. "The wife of Colonel Pembert, no less."

Coarse red brows came down, the detective's eyes narrowed. He muttered, "Pembert? The racehorse man, huh?"

"The same. And if I was a betting man, which I ain't, I'd see if the colonel has a horse running at Hialeah this afternoon and put a bet on him."

Michael Shayne tugged at the lobe of his left ear with his right thumb and forefinger. He said, "Give."

The fat man shrugged. "It's a hunch, maybe. When a dame asks for three G's on a string of pearls worth ten and swears she'll redeem them in twenty-four hours, and if she's married to a string of fast horses—well, your guess is as good as mine."

Shayne said, "Yeah—and it's still a guess." He straightened his lean frame and twisted his wide mouth into a grin. "At that I haven't bought the bangtails my quota of hay this season."

The Miami sun blazing down on Michael Shayne's red hair was his personal contribution to the riotous color at Hialeah Park that afternoon as he shouldered his way at the finish of the second race toward a small group in the paddock. There were four of them watching two handlers saddle a spirited bay filly.

Shayne nodded and said, "Hello, Colonel Pembert," to an erect white-mustached man in his late sixties.

The colonel said, "It's Mr. Shayne, isn't it?" and offered his hand, touching his wife's arm. "You've met Angela, I believe."

Shayne received a smile that outdazzled the bright sunshine. "You're just in time to arbitrate an argument," the blond wife of Colonel Pembert told him. She nodded to a thin little man standing in front of them and waving a violent forefinger under the colonel's nose. "Mr. Gainly has the silly idea that his Nimrod will win the third race."

Mr. Gainly had a shrewd face, the color of well-rubbed saddle leather. A double-breasted blue coat hung slackly from hunched thin shoulders. He glanced at the tall redhead and cackled, "If you're looking for a winner, young man—"

"He'll do well to lay his money on Speed Queen," Colonel Pembert interrupted.

Shayne glanced over their heads at the prancing filly. "Would that be Speed Queen?"

The little man's cackle held an undertone of venomous glee. "The colonel will be changing her name after Nimrod runs her off those pretty legs of hers."

"Mr. Gainly," the colonel explained acidly, "is the owner of a sway-backed dog named Nim-

rod that's been entered by mistake in the third. Take a tip from me, Shayne, and back Speed Queen."

Shayne laughed easily. "I lost my last two shirts on tips like that. I've sworn I'll never lay another cent on the nose of a horse until I see the trainer himself putting his own money up."

His gaze traveled past the colonel and his wife to rest on a broad-shouldered young man wearing a polo shirt, whipcords and shiny puttees. The young man had a strong wind-burned face with full sensuous lips. Angela Pembert stood very close to him and there was a look in her blue eyes that gave Shayne a hunch Colonel Pembert would be smart if he kept a pair of handcuffs on her.

"You'd see that very thing today," the colonel told Shayne heartily. "Eh, Deerson?" — to the broad-shouldered young man. "Were it not for my inviolable rule that no employee of the Pembert Stable may put money on a race in which we have an entry."

"That's right, colonel." Deerson shrugged elaborately and his brown eyes were sullen. "That rule of yours is the only thing that's keeping me from picking up a fortune at the odds we've worked up by hiding Speed Queen's form until after this race." His voice trailed off as he glanced over in front of the grandstand at the automatic tote board showing the approximate odds on each entry.

Gainly snorted derisively. "No matter what the odds, young man, you're still out what you bet on a loser." He turned away, chuckling under his breath.

The colonel smiled and patted his wife's supple hand. "We'd better be on our way, Angela. They're going to the post."

As the colonel's wife turned away, Shayne detected a long veiled look of understanding between her and young Deerson. He lingered behind and when the aged colonel and his fortyish wife were out of earshot, he bluntly asked the trainer, "How about it? Is the filly set for this race?"

Deerson said quietly, "We've been pointing her for this one all season. She'll take it easy and hit the stretch like nobody's business."

"Too bad," said Shayne sympathetically, "Colonel Pembert doesn't allow you to bet."

The trainer twisted his full lips into a sneer. He muttered, "He won't be giving me orders after this race," then turned abruptly and strode away.

Shayne's speculative gaze followed his swinging stride. A frown creased the detective's gaunt face when he saw Deerson being joined by Neil Dunlap, a well-known local gambler and reputedly a heavy plunger at the track. The two men had their heads together in earnest conversation and when they parted Dun-

lap hurried toward the betting window.

Shayne sauntered along behind the gambler, took a place in the line two places behind Dunlap in front of the hundred-dollar window. He was close enough to hear the gambler say, "Thirty to win on number three."

Shayne glanced over his shoulder at the odds board while the cashier was counting Dunlap's money. Speed Queen was No. 3 and her closing odds were approximately 13 to 1.

When he reached the window he laid down two fifties and said, "Number three to win."

Shayne leaned against the fence and put flame to a cigarette as a thunderous roar from the grandstand behind him greeted the start of the third race. Sonny Boy, favorite in the betting, broke fast and took the rail. Nimrod was bunched with two others behind him and Speed Queen was one of the ruck.

He flipped his match away and watched the progress of the race with incurious eyes. The overflow crowd pressed him against the fence, shrilly imploring Sonny Boy to bring home their bacon.

Sonny Boy was doing just that at the far turn—leading the field by three lengths. As they made the turn Shayne caught a glimpse of the brilliant red-and-yellow Pembert silks showing through the pack a few lengths behind the favorite, and coming along nicely.

Deerson had said the filly was slated to take it easy, then hit the stretch fast. She was beginning to close, challenging Nimrod and a black gelding, proof that the redhead hadn't fallen for a sucker hunch.

Speed Queen's jockey was low, his arm rising and falling rhythmically. The filly responded by eating up the track. Two lengths in the lead Sonny Boy lurched wide, turning into the stretch. The crowd groaned as they sensed the opportunity for the flying filly to steal the rail at the turn. But her jockey muffed it, swinging wide also and driving up on the now tiring and straining leader.

It was Speed Queen and Sonny Boy coming down the stretch. Neck and neck, with three others bunched two lengths back. Then Speed Queen forged ahead and Shayne began mentally spending thirteen hundred dollars.

Something happened.

Fifty thousand spectators saw it happen without realizing what they were seeing.

The low-lying red-and-yellow silks up on Speed Queen lurched sidewise and fell in a crumpled heap to the track in the path of pounding hoofs that could not swerve aside.

The filly faltered and bumped Sonny Boy. Together they slowed and the field swept past them. A red-and-yellow heap remained motionless on the track. An ambulance wailed and white-coated

men were trotting toward Speed Queen's fallen jockey.

Shayne remained motionless at the fence. His rough-hewn face was impassive and smoke trailed lazily from flaring nostrils. His narrowed eyes quested toward the tote board and watched Nimrod's number go up in the win spot.

Shayne's knobby fingers fumbled in his pocket and pulled out his ticket on Speed Queen. He stared at the bit of pasteboard with bleak eyes, then turned and shouldered his way through the excited mob surrounding a waiting ambulance.

Shayne stopped a white-faced track official and asked thinly, "What's the verdict?"

The official made a gesture of despair. "The jock is dead. Must have fainted. Head smashed all to hell by the horses that trampled him after he fell off."

Shayne dropped his cigarette butt and moodily ground it under his toe. He studied the hundred-dollar ducat in his hand, started to tear it in half. He hesitated and a queer expression hardened his gaunt features.

He didn't tear up the ticket. He placed it carefully in his wallet and sauntered toward the payoff windows, where lines were forming—lines of beaming winners lucky enough to hold the numbers of the first three horses across the wire.

The lines were longest at the two-dollar and across-the-board windows. Progressively shorter at the five, ten, fifty and hundred-dollar wickets.

Shayne stopped and lounged unobtrusively against a post between the short lines holding fifty and hundred-dollar tickets.

Those who cashed that kind of bet at Hialeah were pretty much of a type—round-paunched retired businessmen, wealthy young idlers of both sexes, a sprinkling of steely-eyed professional gamblers.

A muscle jumped in Shayne's lower jaw when he saw a pallid-faced punk wedged in between two portly heavy-money bettors. It was Pinky Deems, wearing scuffed shoes and a tight-belted coat, with the snap brim of a Panama pulled low as he made an obvious effort to appear at ease in unfamiliar surroundings.

Shayne knew Pinky for a cheap tout who never ventured more than five dollars of his own money on any race. And Pinky was nervously fanning out a sheaf of fifty-dollar win tickets as he approached the cashier.

Shayne's speculative gaze shifted to the hundred-dollar line. A girl was turning away from the window, stuffing a wad of bills into her handbag. She showed a statuesque figure in a knitted sports frock and her bold eyes met Shayne's for a moment from beneath the wide brim of a jaunty felt hat.

He recognized her and began to smile but she turned away coldly and hurried toward an exit

gate. She was billed as Peggy Davoe at a Miami Beach hotspot and Shayne knew she was doing well if she pulled down a hundred-a-week salary. Yet she was cashing hundred-dollar ducats on Nimrod! That made as much sense as the dough Pinky Deems was stuffing into his pocket when he turned away from the window.

Shayne moved forward and dropped his hand on the tout's shoulder. Pinky whirled with a yelp of fright. "Jeez, if it ain't Mike Shayne! Give a guy the jumps grabbin' him that way." He tried to edge away from Shayne's hand.

The detective's grip tightened. He said, "I never thought I'd see you dragging down heavy sugar, Pinky. I didn't think you punks believed your own tips."

Pinky laughed ingratiatingly. The tip of his long nose quivered. He glanced over his shoulder at the shortening line of winners. "You got me wrong if you figure I've been cashin' in. I just got bus fare back to town. But I got a hot one in the sixt—"

Shayne shook his head. "I had some dough on Speed Queen." He paused. "I hate to be played for a sucker."

Pinky's pale eyes darted upward at him. "Yeah? Speed Queen, huh?" His voice was flat. "Tough about the jock. Just when he was bootin' one home too."

"But lucky," said Shayne gravely, "for anybody who had their dough riding Nimrod's nose."

Pinky Deems sucked in his breath sharply. He said, "Yeah. Plenty lucky. Look, I got to see a guy—"

Shayne's fingers tightened again on his thin shoulder. "I'm out over a grand because Speed Queen's jockey took a nose-dive in the stretch. I'm still holding that ticket, Pinky. It might be smart for somebody to buy it from me. Pass the word along. I'll be in my apartment until four o'clock. After four o'clock will be too late."

Pinky wilted. He muttered weakly, "I dunno what you're talkin' about."

"Just pass the word along," Shayne said softly. He released Pinky and strode away.

The nominees for the next race were parading before the grandstand with a blare of trumpets to draw the attention of the crowd and there were few who noticed a couple of overalled workmen spreading sand over the clotted blood where Speed Queen's jockey had fallen.

Shayne strode directly to a spot outside the fence and opposite the two workmen, stood there for a moment with closed eyes while he recalled the exact positions of the speeding horses as the jockey fell.

He saw them clearly in retrospect—Sonny Boy on the rail with Speed Queen pressing close on the outside, a neck in the lead.

He opened his eyes and pivoted slowly, his gaze intent on the skyline as he turned.

Westward the clubhouse and grandstand loomed close, obscuring all else in that direction. Toward the south a double row of royal palms lined the entrance driveway, plumy fronds cutting the skyline above sleek trunks. Directly eastward the flower-draped wall of the track formed a low horizon, with only twin radio towers showing above the top of the fence.

Shayne wasted but a brief speculative glance in those directions, then stood for a long time staring northward. A row of stables and feed barns lined the northern boundary of the track. Perhaps half a mile beyond them the top story of an unfinished building looked down at the track and at Michael Shayne.

He recognized the building as a leftover from the boom days of '26, when visionaries had begun construction of a hotel in the undeveloped territory north of Hialeah. When the bubble exploded the building had been abandoned with only the framework and lower exterior completed. A row of unglassed windows stared vacantly back at the detective from the upper floor of the deserted structure. He had an uneasy conviction that he would make a perfect target for a high-powered rifle fitted with telescopic sights. Almost as good a target as the red-and-yellow silks of a jockey astride a horse on the stretch.

The roar of the crowd for the fourth race was thunderous in the background as Shayne went to the parking lot and got into his convertible. He circled the grandstand and drove east between the double row of stately royal palms. At the exit a paved highway ran north and south outside the rock wall. He turned north.

Past the north wall of the tract was a low expanse of flatland overgrown with straggly palmettos and native shrubs. The unfinished hotel stood in the center of the tract, gaunt and alone.

Shayne drove slowly along the highway, searching for a turn-off leading to the deserted structure. Due east of the hotel, he found a pair of ruts leading in the right direction. He got out and made a close examination of the old road, found fresh tire tracks leading to and from the building.

His watch said it was three thirty. The unclaimed ticket on Speed Queen in his wallet was a nagging reminder that the death of a jockey had cost him thirteen hundred dollars.

He got in his car and making a U-turn, drove swiftly back to Miami. On Flagler Street, he stopped at a corner newsstand and bought both of the daily papers, the *Racing Form* and several of the better tip-sheets.

II

In his downtown apartment Michael Shayne tossed his hat on a

rack and laid the papers and racing-sheets on a central table in the living room. He went into the tiny kitchen and put ice cubes into a tall glass, filled it with water and brought it to the table. He got a squat bottle of brandy and a tall glass from a wall cabinet. He filled the glass to the brim, set it beside the ice water and settled himself in a deep chair within easy arm's reach of both glasses.

He took a long drink of brandy and followed it with a sip of ice water, settled his lanky body deeper in the chair and began a perusal of the experts' dope on that day's racing at Hialeah. The hands of a wall clock stood at three fifty.

He laid the papers aside and lit a cigarette nine minutes later. His gaunt features held a look of somber triumph. Not a single handicapper had gone out on a limb to pick Nimrod in the third race. The consensus made Sonny Boy a heavy favorite to win, with Nimrod to place and a couple of others vying for show. Speed Queen was not conceded an outside chance to run in the money by any of the handicappers in the papers.

He emptied his glass of brandy and let smoke trail from his nostrils. His hunch had been confirmed by the racing-sheets. The heavy money on Nimrod's nose had been placed there by someone who knew what was going to happen, someone who knew Speed Queen had been kept under wraps and was fast enough to press the favorite in the stretch, someone who had murdered a jockey in cold blood to throw the two leaders off stride and allow Nimrod to pass them both.

Shayne glanced at the clock and tugged at the lobe of his left ear. It was four o'clock—the deadline he had given Pinky Deems for the payoff. He slowly extracted his wallet and drew out the win ticket on Speed Queen. He grimaced at his own hesitation. It was past four o'clock, yet he was still hoping to cash that ticket.

He replaced the oblong of cardboard in his wallet and got up. His upper lip drew back from his teeth, giving his lean face a look of wolfish anticipation.

He was halfway to the telephone when a rap on the door halted him. He paused in midstride, went to the door and jerked it open.

A Western Union messenger held out a small paper-wrapped parcel, asking, "Mr. Shayne?"

Shayne took it, signed a receipt, said, "Where did this come from?"

"The main office. It was to be delivered not later than four o'clock."

Shayne nodded and closed the door. He carried the parcel to the table and tore off the wrapping from a square box of white cardboard. He lifted the cover

and blinked a couple of times at the contents. Beads of sweat formed on his corrugated forehead and his jaw muscles tightened. His hand strayed out and groped for the brandy bottle, lifted it to his lips while his gaze remained fixed downward.

He drank deeply from the bottle and set it aside with a thump. A bloody human ear lay neatly arranged in a nest of absorbent cotton inside the box. A strip of paper below the freshly severed ear bore a warning printed in pencil—

PINKY LISTENED TOO HARD. HE WON'T HEAR YOU NEXT TIME YOU SPOUT OFF. IF YOU DO.

Shayne turned to the telephone. He got the city room of the Miami *Daily News* and asked for Timothy Rourke.

When Rourke's voice came over the wire the redhead asked, "Is it too late to make over your front page, Tim?"

"Who's talking?"

"Mike Shayne."

"Mike? It's not too late to make it over for the final if you've got something hot."

"I wouldn't bother you if it was cool. Here it is and I want to be quoted—'The death of Speed Queen's jockey in the third race at Hialeah this afternoon wasn't accidental. It was murder.'"

"Wait, Mike! What the hell!"

Shayne growled, "Run it just that way."

"What have you got to go on?"

"I know how it was done and why. I don't know who. Not yet."

"I need some details. I can't just—"

"I've never yet given you a bum steer, Tim. Run it as a quote from me and you'll be in the clear." Shayne clicked up the receiver before Rourke could think of further objections.

He strode back to the table and poured himself another drink. He had been too conservative over the phone. He should have mentioned two murders. For it had to be that way. After Pinky Deems had put the finger on himself by delivering the detective's message it was a cinch he couldn't go on living.

Shayne sighed and moodily emptied his glass of brandy. He put the cover back on the cardboard box and carried it to the refrigerator, where he made room for it between a head of lettuce and a pound of sliced bacon.

One angle of the case had him stopped. Why had murder been committed to prevent Speed Queen from winning? The man who planned it had to know the filly was due to cop. And at better odds than Nimrod paid. Why then hadn't the murderer simply played Speed Queen to win instead of putting the money on Nimrod's nose? That part of it didn't make sense.

He got his hat and went down to his convertible and drove directly to Police Headquarters. He went in a side door and into the private office of the chief of detectives without knocking.

Will Gentry looked up from a littered desk with a placid smile. "Take the weight off your dogs, Mike."

Chief Gentry was a heavy-boned florid-faced man. He ran his department with unimaginative efficiency and he and the private detective were close personal friends.

Shayne slid his rangy body into a chair. He drawled, "How many killings does it take in one day to blast you off your fat rump?"

Gentry's bright blue eyes regarded him with wary speculation. "I haven't heard about any killings. If you'll tell me where you've hidden the bodies I'll look into it."

Shayne grinned and lit a cigarette. "I wonder how you'd get along with me, Will." He paused, asked through a cloud of smoke, "What's your report on the jock killed at Hialeah?"

Chief Gentry put a blunt forefinger on a sheet of paper in front of him. "Unavoidable accident. Doc Haines says the other horses were bunched so close they couldn't swerve when he fell off. Heart attack is the preliminary prognosis."

Shayne laughed shortly. "Change that to lead poisoning."

Gentry shook his head. He said, "You're nuts," in a placid voice.

"I can't prove it," Shayne admitted.

"Doc Haines didn't report any bullet wound."

"How would he, with the jock's head smashed all to hell?"

Gentry leaned back and bit the end off a blunt cigar. "What have you got, Mike?"

"I'm going to get paid when I give," Shayne protested. "It cost me thirteen hundred berries for Speed Queen to lose that race. Somebody's going to make that up to me." He paused, went on softly, "On top of the jock, a tout named Pinky Deems won't be taking any more sucker money around town. Put out a pick-up for him if you don't believe me."

Chief Gentry squared his jaw and grumbled, "You're talking a lot without saying very much."

Shayne stood up and stretched long arms over his head. He grinned wryly. "Two murders in the last couple of hours, Will. And I'm slated to be number three."

Gentry's telephone burred. He scooped it up and growled, "Yeah?"

He listened a moment, his blue eyes probing up at Shayne's face. He said, "Of course, Colonel Pembert. I understand perfectly. As it happens, Mr. Shayne is with me now. We'll both be right up to see you."

He replaced the telephone and complained, "Why the hell do

you have to shoot off your big mouth to the papers?"

Shayne grinned irritatingly. "I'm out to collect my bet, Will. Doesn't the colonel approve of murder?"

"I'm afraid he doesn't—nor rumors of murder." Will Gentry sighed and heaved his square body upward from the creaking chair. "He demands a retraction or some concrete proof to back up your crazy accusation."

Shayne said, "The hell he does." His gray eyes were humid. "I didn't accuse him of anything."

"He considers it a reflection on his stable, on the glorious sport of thoroughbred racing," Gentry explained worriedly. He crammed a limp felt hat down on his head and strode out the door.

They got in Shayne's car and drove to a hotel fronting on Biscayne Boulevard and the bay. Colonel Pembert met them at the door of an upstairs suite. He brandished a last edition of the *News* and demanded, "Have you seen this preposterous headline?"

Gentry shook his head and took the paper from Pembert's shaking hand. Shayne craned his neck to read over Gentry's shoulder—

SHAYNE DECLARES
SUPPOSED TRACK
ACCIDENT IS MURDER

Shayne grinned at the colonel and complained, "It's all your fault, you know, Colonel Pembert."

"My fault! By God, sir, explain yourself!" Pembert's white mustaches bristled.

Shayne caught himself, hoping the old fellow didn't have high blood pressure. "It's your fault that I have a personal interest in the murder," Mike explained smoothly. "It was your recommendation that caused me to lay a hundred on Speed Queen's nose. At thirteen to one I'm out a wad because the jockey was murdered."

"And is that," the colonel demanded fiercely, "your sole reason for stirring up a public stench over an accident?"

"I say it's murder."

"And *I* say you're a fool," Pembert thundered.

Shayne shrugged wide shoulders. "I'm going to keep on calling it murder until someone buys my ticket on Speed Queen at par."

"Blackmail!" the colonel interjected fiercely. "Do you hear that, Gentry?"

Before the detective chief could reply an inner door opened to admit the colonel's wife. Angela Pembert had changed from her dashingly youthful sports costume to a more subdued afternoon gown of turquoise-blue crepe. Fresh powder camouflaged but could not hide traces of recent tears. Her voice was strained and almost shrill as she demanded, "What is it, Pemby? What on earth is this brawling about?"

Pembert turned and held out

the paper to her. "This fool, who calls himself a private detective, is determined to make murder out of the accident at the track this afternoon."

She took the paper and scanned the headline wonderingly. She compressed her lips and lifted her eyes to look directly at Shayne. A pulse throbbed at the base of her throat. Holding Shayne's gaze she asked, "Are you sure he isn't right, Pemby?"

"Nonsense, Angela!" Pembert blustered.

The colonel's wife took a step toward Shayne, then turned aside and walked to a window, where she stood looking out over the blue of Biscayne Bay.

Shayne asked, "What makes you so sure it's nonsense, colonel? Are you forgetting that Nimrod won at nice odds?"

"John Gainly is a conniving and crafty old reprobate," Pembert declared, "but he wouldn't murder a jockey to win over me."

Shayne looked across the room at Mrs. Pembert's rigid back. He said, "I'd like to talk this over with your trainer. Where does Deerson hang out?"

A shiver rippled down the smooth fabric covering Mrs. Pembert's spine. She kept her back obstinately turned, as the colonel replied with some heat, "Deerson is no longer my trainer. I gave him his walking papers half an hour ago."

"Do you mind giving us your reason?" Michael Shayne asked.

"Not at all. You saw the race. Can you tell me why in the name of God my filly was pulled wide on the turn and failed to take the fence against Sonny Boy?"

Shayne shrugged, "I suppose the jockey missed his cue."

"My trainers understand they are held directly responsible for any such things. I will not tolerate such blunders."

Shayne said, "That seems little reason for firing a good man. Are you sure you didn't just seize on that as an excuse?"

He was still watching Angela. This time her head jerked around. She met Shayne's eyes and her mouth was twisted in a bitter smile that told him what he wanted to know.

The colonel snorted through his mustaches and deserted the subject of Deerson by demanding, "What proof have you that the jockey was murdered?"

"None," Shayne admitted cheerfully, but I'm gathering bits of evidence that add up." He was interrupted by a loud pounding on the door.

Pembert stepped past him to open it. John Gainly came bustling in, waving Shayne's provocative headline. "Have you seen this, Pembert? Is this your work?"

"Not mine, John. What makes you think—"

"It sounds like one of your tricks, colonel. You put up a boy who can't hold his stirrups and then go crying to the papers with

some balderdash about murder when he falls off."

Shayne said, "That was entirely my idea, Gainly."

The shrunken little man turned on him angrily. "So you're the famous detective?" he sneered. "What's your gripe? Did you have a five-spot on Speed Queen?"

Shayne grinned. "That's my gripe. Only it was a C-note. I would have won thirteen of the same if Speed Queen had been allowed to win."

"It's blackmail," the colonel said again angrily. "Just a moment ago he practically offered to withdraw his accusation if someone would bribe him to do it."

"I didn't say anything about withdrawing my accusation. I merely said my interest in the case would cease." Shayne shrugged, then turned on Gainly, "How much did you collect on Nimrod?"

"Plenty," Gainly replied. "Plenty. I knew my horse had the stuff to take that race."

"He was beaten twice until a rifle bullet knocked off Speed Queen's jockey and gave him a chance to win," Shayne pointed out evenly.

John Gainly breathed hard through compressed lips. "If you think you're scaring me, young man—"

Shayne said, "I'm not trying to scare anybody. Somebody cashed in on murder this afternoon and beat me—out of my winnings."

"In front of fifty thousand people?" Gainly snorted. "I was there and saw nothing to indicate murder."

Shayne turned bleak eyes on him. He drawled, "Few men have seen a rifle bullet in action."

"But the medical report," Pembert protested weakly. "I talked to the doctor who examined Taylor. He said nothing about foul play."

Shayne said, "A steel-jacketed rifle bullet doesn't leave much evidence as it passes through a skull that's smashed a moment later by a dozen iron-shod galloping hoofs."

In the silence that followed his words he turned and asked Gentry, "Coming with me, Will?"

Gentry shook his head. "I've been thinking up some questions I want to ask Colonel Pembert privately."

Shayne nodded and went out. He was waiting at the end of the corridor for an elevator when Gainly hurried out and down the corridor toward him. An elevator stopped and the doors slid open as Gainly reached his side.

They stepped into the crowded cage together and rode down to the lobby. Gainly squeezed thin fingers into Shayne's arm and drew the detective to a secluded corner alcove behind two potted palms. He said, "We can talk freely here."

"What have we got to talk about? You know my stand."

Gainly said, "I want to know what your game is."

Shayne shrugged. "I put all my cards on the table upstairs."

"You're sore because you bet on Speed Queen and lost."

Shayne nodded. "Plenty sore," he amplified.

"All your talk about murder is just talk," Gainly charged. "You don't care whether it's true or not. If you do enough smearing you figure someone is going to pay you to shut up."

Shayne looked down at the little man with a glint of amusement in his gray eyes. "Something like that."

"I presume," Gainly exploded, "you know your accusation points directly at me as Nimrod's owner."

"You certainly profited by the jockey's death."

"That's it. I don't deny it. But I do deny murdering him."

"No one," said Shayne easily, "has accused you of murder—yet."

"It amounts to that. There'll be fingers pointed at me. There'll be an investigation by the racing commission." The little man was trembling with anger. His lips were drawn away from his teeth.

Shayne nodded cheerfully. "I'm still wondering what you and I have to talk about."

Gainly made a despairing gesture with clawlike hands. "You've got me hooked and you know it. As I understand it your price is thirteen hundred dollars."

Shayne said, "You must have won a lot more on Nimrod today."

Gainly drew a fat wallet from the inner pocket of his loose-hung coat. He carefully counted out thirteen hundred dollars in bills. Shayne stuffed them into his pocket. He said, "Too bad you waited until after four o'clock," and started to turn away.

John Gainly grabbed his arm. "What do you mean by that?"

Shayne looked over his shoulder and down at the little horse owner. He said, "Figure it out for yourself," shook off Gainly's grasping fingers and strode away without looking back.

III

The Turf Club on Second Street was crowded and noisy when Shayne pushed open the swinging doors. A lot of the noise subsided when the men crowded about the bar saw who the newcomer was.

Shayne stood just inside the doorway on wide-spread feet and let his placid gaze wander down the line of barflies. There was some whispering and Neil Dunlap turned his head to look at Shayne. The gambler's eyes were bloodshot and his gray cheeks were flushed. He said, "You're a lousy loser."

Shayne nodded. "I'm not in the habit of losing." He strolled forward and men made way for him to reach Dunlap's side. He rested both elbows on the bar and said, "Martel" to the bartender.

"Other guys," said Dunlap bitterly, "dropped a hatful on Speed

Queen this afternoon without running to teacher and yapping that some bad man killed the jock just to be mean to them." The gambler was swaying on his feet. He thrust his face pugnaciously close to Shayne's.

The detective disregarded him. He filled a double shot-glass with brandy and sipped it meditatively. As though addressing no one in particular, he said flatly, "And some ginzos that do a lot of squawking are the kind that make a big play by betting another man's money."

"Meaning me, Shayne?"

"Meaning whoever it fits."

Dunlap laughed bitterly. "No one can say I don't back my own hunches. A grand on Sun Shadow Monday. Two on Black Mood yesterday. Three on Speed Queen today. I'll hit tomorrow and it'll be four grand on Gay Dancer."

A hawk-faced man on the other side of Dunlap laughed effusively. "You sure do go overboard on a system when you fall for one, Neil. What's next after Number Seven in the seventh if you've lost up till then?"

"He gets himself another system." Someone behind Dunlap guffawed.

Dunlap pounded his glass on the bar. "Nobody can say I'm a piker that gripes when I drop a bet."

"Meaning that for me?" Shayne asked.

"Meaning whoever it fits."

Shayne turned slowly and hooked both elbows over the bar behind him. "Anybody seen Pinky Deems around?"

Somebody said, "Pinky was around a couple of hours ago. Ducked right out though."

Shayne turned his head to let his gray eyes bore into Dunlap's whiskey-flushed face. "You must have been talking to Pinky."

Dunlap snarled, "Why must I?"

"You seem to know why I'm after the guy that knocked off Speed Queen's jockey this afternoon."

Dunlap said, "Hell, everybody knows you're sore because you didn't collect on a lousy hundred-dollar bet."

Shayne said, "I'd like to hang a murder around your neck, Dunlap."

It became very quiet in the barroom. Dunlap shuffled his feet unsteadily and the scuffing sound was loud in the stillness. He finally blustered, "You better look for somebody that had money riding on Nimrod's nose."

Shayne said, "That's what I'm doing," and the unnatural silence persisted.

"I had my dough on Speed Queen just like you. That lets me out."

"Sure—if it was your money."

"What makes you think I'd be fronting for a sucker bet?"

Shayne said, "I saw you close-mugging with Pembert's trainer at the track just before you placed that three grand."

"What of it? I was checking

with Deerson on a hot tip that the filly was ready to click."

Shayne said, "Maybe." His eyes were bleak. "And maybe you did Deerson a favor by laying a bet for him because the colonel doesn't allow his trainer to gamble."

Dunlap laughed weakly. "Where do you think Deerson'd get his mitts on three grand? Long-shots have kept him broke all season."

Shayne said coldly, "I've got a damn good idea where he got the three grand. Maybe it wasn't that way, Dunlap. I'm only saying it would have been smart to lay his money for him if you'd planned to blast Speed Queen's jockey in that race. Where'll I find Deerson?" he ended abruptly.

Dunlap muttered, "How should I know?" and turned to pour himself another drink.

Shayne looked around the ring of faces that had been watching the scene avidly. "Any of you know where Pembert's trainer hangs out?"

He got some negative headshakes. Then a tout on the fringe of the crowd volunteered, "He spends most of his nights and cash over at the Beach Casino."

Shayne said, "Thanks." He dropped half a dollar on the bar and went out.

A woman arose from a chair and moved to intercept Michael Shayne when he stalked across the lobby of his apartment hotel. It was Angela Pembert. She put her hand on his arm and said, "I've been waiting for you to come in."

Shayne regarded the plump prettiness of her face. Her blue eyes were wide and appealing. She dropped her lids nervously before his searching gaze and fluttered both hands. "I know what you must think of me but I have to talk to you."

Shayne said, "Come along," and led the way to a waiting elevator. In his apartment he motioned to a chair and asked, "Can I get you a drink?"

She sat on the extreme edge of the chair with her knees pressed tightly together. She shook her head violently. "No, I think not."

Shayne went to the center table and poured a highball glass half full of brandy.

She began timidly, "I know that you know everything. My husband told me this afternoon that you've been spying on me."

Shayne had his back half turned to her, leaning over the table and turning the pages of one of the racing sheets to information about the races of the two preceding days. He muttered, "Did Colonel Pembert tell you that?"

"Yes. Right after he fired Dick —Mr. Deerson. He was in a dreadful temper."

Shayne muttered, "I guessed that must have been his real reason for firing Deerson."

"I—I'm so ashamed." Her words were blurred with tears. "I don't know what possessed me," she sobbed. "The colonel is really a darling. I was just

swept off my feet. I'm just a silly weak woman."

Shayne appeared to be not listening. He was studying the post entries for Monday's races. Sun Shadow had held the No. 1 position in the first race and came in fourth. On Tuesday, the preceding day, Black Mood had been No. 2 in the second and was listed among the also-rans. Shayne's eyes glistened as he turned to the preview of the next day's running at Hialeah. Gay Dancer was listed as No. 4 in the fourth race.

He dropped the sheet abruptly and turned to see Mrs. Pembert crying softly into a lace handkerchief. He asked her, "Do you know anything about betting systems?"

The sudden question brought the handkerchief away from her face. She faltered, "Betting systems? N-not much. Most gamblers have one system or another, I believe. They're all horribly superstitious."

Shayne settled down in a chair and took a sip from his glass. "Did you ever hear of anyone fool enough to bet, say, one dollar on the number one horse of the first race—then two bucks on number two in the second the next day—three on number three in the third the following day—and so on?"

Angela's blue eyes were wide with interest now. Her tears were drying as she forgot her own troubles. "I never heard of exactly that system but"—she wrinkled her smooth forehead—"it doesn't sound any crazier than some other systems I've heard racing men talking about."

Shayne nodded abruptly. He said, "Now, what sort of nonsense were you talking a while ago?"

Her tears started afresh. "About — the things you've told the colonel in your reports on me." She leaned forward tensely. "Have you told him yet about me pawning my necklace this morning?"

"What makes you think I've been spying on you?" Shayne demanded.

"Oh, don't put me off. Don't you see I have to know? Don't you see how important it is?"

Shayne shook his head and took a sip of brandy. "How important is it?"

"Don't you see that it—that it's the clue in that jockey's death this afternoon? If the colonel knew I pawned my pearls and gave the money to Dick to bet on Speed Queen, then he's the one who arranged that murder. To make sure that Dick would lose, because he knew that if Dick won all that money I was planning to go off with him. Don't you see I have to know?"

Shayne held up both big hands. "Wait a minute. Are you suggesting your husband arranged to have his own jockey killed so Deerson would lose your money that he'd bet on Speed Queen?"

"Don't you see that's what he might have done? If he loved me enough. And I didn't know. I thought he didn't care." She was

whimpering now, and dabbing ineffectually at the stream of tears flowing down both cheeks.

Shayne hesitated a moment. "When did the colonel tell you he'd had me shadowing you?"

"This afternoon. After the races. He told me he had daily reports of my every movement for the past week. He — he even quoted things I'd said to Dick when we were alone."

"And he told you *I* had furnished those reports?" Shayne demanded incredulously.

"Well, he told me he'd hired a private detective to follow me. So, of course, I knew it must be you because he knows you. And I've seen you around several times."

"A woman's logic," said Shayne angrily, "is a hellish and a wonderful thing. Good God! There are a dozen private agencies in Miami that specialize in such divorce investigations. I've never touched one of those cases in my life. I'm a detective, not a sneaking termite."

"You mean, you haven't—"

"I have not!"

"Oh, God," she moaned. "Oh, God, in heaven. And I've told you—"

"You've given me some damned interesting information," Shayne admitted dryly. "Though it merely confirms what I've already guessed."

Her tears were streaming afresh. She covered her face with both hands and her plump shoulders shook in a paroxysm of grief and shame.

The telephone brought Shayne to his feet. He reached it in two long strides and said, "Mike Shayne at this end." He listened a moment, tugging at the lobe of his left ear, then said, "I understand, Colonel Pembert. However, I'm afraid it's a little late for that."

He hesitated, frowning moodily. He protested, "You can't just turn a murder investigation on and off like you would an electric light."

He listened further and finally agreed. "All right. Send the money right over. But I'm not promising a thing for it." He clicked the receiver and turned to Angela, explained sardonically, "Your husband has suddenly decided I'm in earnest about this thing. He's decided it's worth thirteen hundred dollars to try to call me off."

"That proves it, doesn't it?" She half rose from her chair, her tear-stained features showing a queer blend of exaltation and of horror.

"Proves what?" Shayne asked crossly.

"That he did it. Oh, he must love me terribly to have done that! The poor lamb—I should be with him now. He must need me dreadfully."

Shayne stood aside to let her go out of the room. All he said was, "You'd better not tell him you've been here or that you know anything about his telephone call."

"I won't tell him anything. I'll help him forget that this dreadful thing ever happened." She trotted out, a matronly and pathetically contrite figure.

Shayne went to the table and emptied his glass of brandy. He paced back and forth with heavy shoulders hunched forward and bony hands clasped behind his back.

After a long interval of meditation, he went to the telephone and called the Mutual Protective Agency. He said, "Hello, Joe. Mike Shayne talking. Have you finished that job for Colonel Pembert yet? . . . Just delivered the final report about an hour ago, eh? Then you won't mind giving me some private dope. I want the address of Dick Deerson, the colonel's trainer . . .

"I know he tied a can to his tail this afternoon. I want his local address. Yeah, I'm working on that track murder. Thanks, Joe, I'll do the same for you one day."

Shayne hung up and scribbled an address on a scratch pad, grabbed his hat and went out of the apartment.

A messenger was at the desk when he stepped into the lobby. The clerk saw him and motioned him over. "This boy just came in with an envelope for you, Mr. Shayne."

Shayne took the envelope and tore it open. He laid a thousand-dollar bill and three hundreds on the desk in front of the amazed clerk, then drew a roll from his pocket and counted out the same amount given him by Gainly.

He said, "I wish you'd put this in your safe for tonight."

The clerk whistled and grinned, "Business sure must be good, Mr. Shayne."

"That's some money I didn't win at Hialeah this afternoon," Shayne explained. "In fact, I haven't cashed my winning ticket yet." He turned and stalked out, leaving the clerk gaping after him.

IV

He parked in front of a shabby hotel on West Flagler Street and went through a small lobby, directly to the stairway, and up one flight. Halfway down a dimly lighted corridor he stopped and knocked on a closed door.

No light showed over the transom and there was no reply to his knock. He tried two keys on his ring before the door swung open. He switched on the light and saw a bedroom in the wild disorder of hasty departure. Some dirty shirts and underwear were balled up in one corner and a heavy dressing gown was draped over a chair near the foot of the bed.

Shayne narrowed his eyes and strode in to open the door of a clothes closet. A heavy woolen suit still hung on a hanger, and a shabby camel's-hair topcoat lay on the floor of the closet. There were no trunks or suitcases in the room.

Shayne whirled out and went

downstairs. He approached a moody-looking woman who was knitting a sweater behind the desk and said, "I'm looking for Dick Deerson."

She kept on knitting, and nodded toward a pile of luggage standing near the outer door. "Checked out this evening. That's his stuff waiting for the drayman to come and get it."

"Do you know where he is now or where he's going?"

She said, "He left the bags to be checked at the station. He's shipping the trunk somewhere."

Shayne walked over and looked at the bags. There were two Gladstones and a pigskin traveling bag. A brassbound steamer trunk stood beside the bags. Shayne bent down and studied the shipping label attached to the handle of the trunk. It was addressed to William Stewart, 711 Fourth Street, Evansville, Indiana. Deerson had not put his name or return address on the shipping tag.

Shayne went to a telephone booth in one corner of the lobby and called John Gainly and Colonel Pembert. He told them both exactly the same thing—"Meet me at the Beach Casino in half an hour. You'll either get your money's worth or your money back."

Both men tried to argue and protest with him but he cut them off without explanation.

The first floor show of the evening was just beginning at the casino at Miami Beach when Shayne walked in. He shook his head at a waiter who tried to steer him to an empty table along the wall, strolled down to the ringside tables, which were already all taken.

He stood there a moment, glancing at the faces of men and women who were watching the gyrations of a team of acrobatic dancers, then circled the roped-off dance floor and pulled out a chair at a table that was occupied.

Dick Deerson glanced up with a frown of annoyance. The frown deepened when he recognized Shayne. He grunted, "Oh, it's you," without evidencing any pleasure in the prospect of Michael Shayne's immediate and unwelcome company.

The detective said, "Yep," and sat down. A waiter came up with a menu and Shayne glanced at the highball glass in front of Deerson, said, "Bring me a side-car," and, as the man started to turn away, "A couple of gentlemen will be here looking for me presently. The name is Shayne."

Deerson was half turned away from him, showing a lot of interest in the acrobatic dancers. Shayne lit a cigarette and said, "I understand the colonel fired you this afternoon. Tough luck."

"I resigned." Deerson's voice was sullen. "Damn the old goat and his job! I can get better ones."

"Leaving town?"

"Sure. The season's almost over here. You know that."

"Seen the final edition of the *News?*"

"No. I've been busy packing."

The waiter brought Shayne's cocktail. He took a sip from the frosty glass and said placidly, "There's an interesting headline in the *News*. It says Speed Queen's jockey was murdered this afternoon."

That brought Deerson around to face him. "Who says so?"

"I do." Shayne grinned slowly. He drew out his wallet, picked out the hundred-dollar win ticket on Speed Queen and pushed it across the table toward Deerson with his forefinger. "I was sucker enough to bet on that filly."

"That wasn't a sucker bet," Deerson denied heatedly. "She had the race sewed up until Taylor took his tumble."

"That's what makes me sore. I practically had my thirteen hundred bucks spent."

"Am I supposed to weep about it?"

"No-o-o. But I thought you might feel a certain responsibility —might want to make up the thirteen hundred I didn't collect."

"Fat chance of that!"

"It was an idea," Shayne said cheerfully. "I thought I'd scare somebody with that murder story and they'd offer to buy that ticket from me to keep the thing quiet."

Deerson laughed shortly. "Do you mean you expect the murderer to bribe you to lay off?"

"Not necessarily the murderer." Shayne spoke with great earnestness. "There were a lot of funny angles tied up with that third race this afternoon. Stuff that's bound to come out if there's a murder investigation. I had an idea some of the parties would pay me to keep the whole thing quiet."

"Why come to me with your funny ideas?"

Shayne shrugged and finished his cocktail. "You were one of my best prospects. For instance, it should be worth something to you to keep your connection with a certain William Stewart of Evansville, Indiana, from getting into the papers."

Deerson's bulky body stiffened. "What — what're you talking about?"

"Angles." Shayne picked up the ticket and fiddled with it. Dropped it in front of Deerson again.

The trainer wet his lips and looked down at the bit of cardboard. In a thick voice he said, "Thirteen hundred, huh?"

"That's what it was worth before the jockey died."

Deerson studied the ticket from under lowered lids as though hypnotized by it. An ugly oath escaped his throat. He said, "You win," and drew a roll of bills from his pocket. He counted out thirteen and shoved them across the table.

Shayne said, "Thanks," and pocketed them. He glanced up the aisle and pushed back his chair a trifle, nodded to Colonel Pembert and John Gainly, who were

being shown to the table by a waiter.

"Draw up some chairs, gentlemen. I'm sure Mr. Deerson will be delighted to see you."

The colonel stopped short when he saw Deerson. His ex-trainer muttered something and started to get up. Shayne said, "This may be embarrassing, but it's always embarrassing for innocent men to sit at the same table with a murderer."

There was a strained silence. Deerson sank back into his chair, staring from Gainly to Pembert. The waiter drew out chairs for them and they sat down heavily. The acrobatic team had spun off the small stage and the M.C. was at the microphone, making an announcement.

The same strained silence held the four men while the microphone announced it was the sad duty of the management to warn that tonight would positively be the final appearance of Peggy Davoe at the casino on account of a previous engagement which was taking her to Broadway.

Shayne reached over and picked up the win ticket on Speed Queen while the announcement was being made. He turned it over and over in his fingers while the other three watched him with interest and speculation.

"You're all here," he told them bluntly, "because you all have a common interest in this ticket. Each one of you, in fact, has paid for it at the current rate of thirteen to one. The money was paid in the expectation of receiving a certain service or concession. I'm going to try to satify all three of you."

He paused, letting his gaze wander over the faces of the three men. "A murder was committed this afternoon and each one of you has tried to bribe me to hush the matter up."

He stilled their protests by holding up a big hand. "Once a murder investigation gets started it's no respecter of persons. A lot of dirty linen is inevitably dragged out into public view. I've been paid to prevent that in this case and I'm going to try to do it."

He turned to Gainly. "You want this whole thing hushed up, don't you? That's what your money was for."

"Naturally, I want it hushed up." Gainly's tone was vitriolic. "As I explained to you—"

Shayne said, "I know the reasons you gave." He turned to Pembert. "You gave me no definite reasons but I think I can state them. In a murder investigation, your wife's infatuation for Deerson is bound to come out. You knew she pawned her necklace and gave him the money to bet on Speed Queen."

The colonel's face was the color of dead ashes. He kept his gaze turned away from Deerson. "I don't know where you got hold of your facts—"

"But they *are* facts," Shayne said pleasantly. "And you, Deer-

son—you prefer to keep the name of William Stewart out of the newspapers. This poses a knotty problem. The only way to see to accomplish all these things is for the murderer to finish the job on himself. Do you all agree?"

The three men stared at him and then at each other.

"Justice will be served," Shayne argued. "And my interest in the case has been repaid triply."

Still there was no reply. Peggy Davoe was singing a hauntingly sweet ballad into the microphone.

Shayne said, "You're elected, Deerson. I don't think it'll matter to Pinky Deems."

"Me?" Deerson exploded. "Why in hell do you think I killed the jock when you admit you know I had a bunch of money on Speed Queen?"

"You wouldn't have killed the jock if your money had been on Speed Queen," Shayne admitted. "But you split the three grand of Mrs. Pembert's up and put them on Nimrod, with Pinky and Miss Davoe making the take for you.

"You guessed that's the way it had to be, didn't you, colonel?" Shayne added. "Because you knew Deerson was just stringing your wife along after he'd gone overboard for Peggy Davoe. And you paid me to hush it up because you didn't want Mrs. Pembert to ever know the truth."

The colonel was breathing heavily. He nodded without speaking.

"To make it look right," Shayne told Deerson, "you'd better shell out the rest of the dough you collected on Nimrod. We'll see that it reaches the jockey's folks. Then the suicide set-up will be perfect—your filly lost this afternoon and you lost your job. Plenty of reason to blow out your brains."

"You're crazy! You can't prove a word of it," Deerson said breathlessly.

"Don't be a sap," Shayne said angrily. "It had to be you. You ordered the jock to take the outside on the stretch so you could pick him off from that half-finished hotel. And don't forget Pinky Deems with one ear missing," he added wolfishly. "It'll be hard to explain why you're shipping Pinky's corpse to a phony address in Indiana with no return address on the label. That was a smart way to get rid of a body but not smart enough."

Deerson's eyes rolled madly. He started to lunge to his feet. Shayne shook his head. "I've got you covered under the table, Deerson. I'll gut-shoot you if you don't sit quiet. That wouldn't be pretty, right here in front of Miss Davoe."

Deerson stayed in his chair. His full lips were rounded and open like a fish sucking in air.

"You're getting all the breaks," Shayne pointed out judicially. "I'm thinking of that girl singing her heart out at the microphone. You'd better start thinking of her. You haven't got a chance, Deer-

son. They'll smear Peggy Davoe's name over the papers and then they'll burn you. She may draw a rap as accessory if this thing goes to trial.

"On the other hand"—Shayne shrugged his shoulders—"I'm giving you an out. Pinky Deems turns up in Indianapolis in an unidentified trunk. The jockey's heirs get the wad of money you won on Nimrod. Peggy Davoe stays clean. Yes or no?"

Deerson wet his lips and exhaled a slobbering gasp. Peggy's voice rang out clear and sweet over the hushed room on the last notes of an old love ballad. Deerson nodded without speaking. He reached in his pocket and slowly drew out a roll of bills.

Shayne shoved them toward the colonel with his forefinger. He withdrew his right hand from under the table and dropped a small automatic into Deerson's sweating palm. "There's a balcony just outside. A clean out, Deerson. A lot of people will suffer if you muff it."

Deerson stood up slowly. He turned his head and met the eyes of the singer, who had stepped back from the microphone. Peggy Davoe smiled at him and he squared his shoulders and smiled in return.

She stepped to the microphone for her final number and Deerson went out through glass doors to an iron-railed balcony overlooking the ocean.

The three men sat at the table without speaking while the singer's voice again filled the room.

A sharp cracking sound came to them through the open doors leading to the balcony. The three men looked at each other and Colonel Pembert sighed. He gathered up the roll of bills and muttered, "Taylor's widow will be glad to receive this, Shayne."

The detective nodded. He was staring down at the oblong of cardboard lying on the table. He picked it up and tore it across twice, then let the pieces fall to the floor with a slight gesture.

his own petard

by . . . Ben Ames Williams

Walder committed a perfect crime but forgot that it isn't just the killing that demands an iron nerve —it's enduring what comes after.

JEFFERY MALLOW was missing. The fact that he had disappeared between nine-twenty in the evening and seven the next morning, as completely as though he never existed, had been reported to the police weeks before. The mystery had run its course in the newspaper headlines, dying for lack of new developments to keep it alive.

Ernest Walder, who had covered every big murder case in the last dozen years for the *Tribune,* had about come to the conclusion that the Mallow case was forgotten. Then one morning in June the furnace-man discovered Mallow's false teeth in the ash-pit. The medical examiner decided Mallow had been murdered and Walder was assigned to cover the story for his paper.

This disturbed Ernest Walder because it was he who had murdered Jeffery Mallow.

Walder was not at all the conventionalized idea of a star reporter. No one had ever applied such a title to him, nor did he ever think of himself in such a way. He was not large and urbane or small and aggressive or dashing and alert.

He was a man about forty-five years old, rather less than average

Ben Ames Williams is a name that is second to none in American literature. His historical romances and interpretations of contemporary Twentieth Century life are classics among book lovers. He was also a prolific producer of magazine stories, and here's one to please the most seasoned connoisseur.

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in height, with a large nose that seemed to grow larger toward the point and a chin which faded away below. His forehead shrank back timidly beneath a thatch of wirelike black hair. His complexion was poor and he had a mole on his left temple, from which three or four dark hairs sprouted.

He walked in a half-shamble, half-swagger, his whole body pivoting from the hips with the swing of his arms, and his dress was usually slightly shabby.

But he was of those men who are born to the newspaper game. He knew what questions to ask and how to read the answers between the lines—how to cajole or provoke an unwilling subject into injudicious revelations—how to hide his own exultation when the revelation had been made. He knew, finally, how to build the resultant story most effectively, from succinct and graphic opening paragraph to the innocuous and desultory conclusion which may be chopped off by a harried make-up man without destroying the cohesion of the whole.

In other words, Walder could get the stuff and he could write it, and such men are valuable to the papers they serve. In no sense was he a distinctive figure. If he had been a little less shabby he would have been completely inconspicuous.

Inspector Peake used to say afterward, in somewhat pompous fashion, that he always thought Walder had a murderer's eyes. But the inspector had the very human failing of being wise after the event. Certainly no one else had ever thought of Walder as a dangerous man. He was no more fearful a figure than the office cat.

The fact that his salary was known to be large—as newspaper salaries go—taken in conjunction with his familiar shabbiness of dress and his abstemious habits, made it clear to the observant eye that he had a family to support. The background of his life, guessed at, was never investigated until afterward. Then such a record of weary illness and inevitable death was revealed that it seemed incredible Walder's weak shoulders could have born so stout a load.

Mrs. Walder said afterwards that her husband was for weeks at a time a figure of strength and courage at home. That he—who was usually rather silent about the office—had a knack for saying amusing things. That he smiled readily, that she was always glad to see him come home in the late afternoon, because she knew that no matter how badly the day had gone it would go better upon his coming.

She admitted, however, that at intervals of weeks Walder himself seemed to collapse. That abruptly and without warning, after a period of unusually heavy worry or care, he would at the least provocation flame into a singularly venomous and aimless rage.

"But afterwards, in just a little while," she said, "he'd break down and cry in my arms like a baby."

She was a strong woman. She had endured the strain, had seen first one child and then the other die. Walder's mother, who lived with them, also died about the time of Mallow's murder, and Mrs. Walder seemed to those who talked with her to be facing the future with a courage and a pride that promised well.

The pitiable aspect of the whole affair was that Walder had always been too proud or too diffident to confess his difficulties to the men in the office. Any one of them would have helped him—and a little help at the right time would have saved him from Mallow.

Mallow was just as well dead. He was one of those men who are known to be wealthy, yet about whose wealth ugly whispers cling. It was a matter of newspaper rumor that he had been associated with a group of blackmailers who operated on a large scale some dozen years before. One or two of them had gone to jail but Mallow had not been brought to trial.

Everyone knew him and he knew everyone. He belonged to all the clubs which were worth belonging to, played bridge or poker with such consistent success that his card companions often changed, and was known to be ready to take a note instead of payment of a heavy loss. It was this willingness on his part to lend money that brought him and Walder together.

Walder, of course, with three sick kinsfolk to support, was continually in need of money. He happened one day to be a spectator at a poker game when Mallow made a considerable killing. And while Mallow folded the checks and tucked them into his pocketbook, Walder could not help thinking that even one of them would relieve him of his present difficulties. That night he went to Mallow's house for the first time.

Mallow was a bachelor but he occupied a house sufficiently large to have accommodated a considerable family. It was one of those high, narrow residences which are packed together, a single wall dividing one from another, along so many city streets. It faced a thoroughfare where the traffic was heavy and in the rear there was a small walled garden with a high masonry terrace which overlooked the river.

This river, curbed by stone embankments in a wide basin, ringed with promenades, and set with lights like jewels strung along the shores and across the bridges, was at night a lovely place. Mallow liked to dine on the terrace so that he might look out across the scene.

The house itself was his hobby. He had spent a great deal of money furnishing it. The appointments were perfection. The table

he set had a reputation among his intimates and those who attended the dinners he occasionally gave formed a sort of freemasonry. To have been Mallow's guest and to meet another man who had also dined there was to meet at once upon common ground. That there was something furtive about this bond did not lessen its force. Quite the reverse.

It was one of Mallow's whims that his house should have three entrances. One was beneath the high stoop. It opened into a small, square hall paneled in walnut, with an automatic elevator at one side. Mallow himself habitually came in by this door and took the elevator to one of the upper floors.

There were five floors in the house. The servants—a valet, a butler, and a man who served as cook and steward—lived on the topmost and had their own elevator from the service quarters in the rear of the lower floor.

Of the three intermediate stories the lowest, which was entered directly from the door at the head of the stoop, was divided into two rooms, dining-hall and living-room. On the floor above were Mallow's library, his private sitting-room, and a card room. His sleeping quarters were on the fourth floor.

The third entrance was by way of the garden in the rear via a single narrow stair leading to his library on the third floor. If a person came to Mallow on business he used this way. If he came as a guest he entered by the front door. If he came even more intimately, Mallow himself usually admitted him to the small hall beneath the stoop and so to the elevator.

Walder did not know these things, so on his first visit to Mallow's house he rang the bell at the front door. The butler looked at him with cold attention and asked his business. Walder, after a moment's hesitation, told the man to say that he was a reporter from the *Tribune*.

Jeffery Mallow, who never neglected an opportunity to make new contacts with the newspaper world, directed that he be admitted. Walder came frankly to the point. He said he wished to borrow money, explained the circumstances, and found his further apologetic words cut off by Mallow's hearty assent to his request.

"I want to pay interest on this, of course," Walder explained.

But Mallow waved the suggestion aside. "Glad to accommodate you. Pay it back when you can."

Walder expected to be able to do so. The future always seemed to promise easier times for him. But at the end of three or four months the fact that he could not pay weighed upon his mind to such an extent that he went to Mallow with apologies. Mallow told him not to worry, that the matter was of small account.

"I'd feel better," Walder urged, "if we put this on a business basis. Let me pay interest or something."

Mallow's persistent refusal sent him away half reassured. But toward the end of the year he found himself again in need of money—and when he went to Mallow again it was with his mind made up that Mallow must let him sign a note for both the old loan and the new one. Mallow agreed and fixed, as he said, a nominal interest.

"You can pay it by the month," he said. "That will make you feel better and it won't burden you any."

Thereafter the affair had run its natural course. At the end of three years Walder footed up his accounts and found that in return for loans totaling nine hundred dollars he had already paid Mallow over twelve hundred and owed him on notes, duly signed, rather more than the amount of the original loans. . . .

Frame, the city editor, beckoned Walder as soon as he came into the office that morning. Walder had read the morning paper on the train. He knew that the mystery of Mallow's disappearance had become the mystery of Mallow's murder. Yet he had not prepared himself to hear what Frame had to say.

Frame, a small, scrubby-haired, voluble young man, thrust a handful of clippings toward Walder and asked excitedly, "See these?"

"I read the *Star's* story," Walder said.

"I've been looking for this," Frame said. "There were a lot of people with reasons for killing him. When a man like that disappears you can usually figure he's gone for good. We can turn ourselves loose now—print a lot of stuff we couldn't use as long as he might turn up alive. Can't libel a dead man. This is the biggest story in ten years. I've got Pratt and Jonas out there with the police and they'll cover us, but I want you to get on the story and stay there."

Walder fumbled the clippings, trying to keep his fingers from trembling. "What do you want?" he asked uncertainly.

"What do I want?" Frame repeated. "I want everything there is. How he was killed—who did it—why. All the dope you can dig up on him. I'm having Rouse write an obit out of the clippings and the stuff he knows. We're going to fill the paper with this, Walder. You don't have to report unless you've got something. But we ought to have three or four columns from you every day—or six or eight. I'll take all you can dig up. You can get at the insides of it if anybody can."

Walder was stifling. It was early June—a warm, moist day. He thought the windows ought to be open. "Well, I'll go out there," he said, and wiped his forehead.

"Call me up," Frame said. "Go to it."

Walder, out in the sun-drenched street, decided to walk. He didn't feel ready to face the policemen and the other reporters who would

be there. His knees were weak, his face felt drawn and pale, his cheeks twitched.

While he walked up the street he watched the faces of those he met, to see whether they noticed anything extraordinary in his appearance. At the corner he stopped at a soda fountain, where the cool blast from the fans dried his brow, and drank a lemon and lime in slow sips, watching the rim of the glass to see how much his hand trembled, studying his own countenance in the mirror behind the counter.

He was almost startled to see that he looked as he always had. The face that stared back at him was the face that looked out from his mirror every morning. With faint and grim amusement, Walder thought how completely this face of his must deceive others since it so nearly deceived himself.

He experimented with different expressions — sorrow, gloom, anger, surprise — watching the play of his features, till he noticed that the clerk was amused. Walder fled. He must avoid attracting attention to himself now.

As he walked through the park he permitted his thoughts to dwell on the night he had killed Mallow. He went over every detail, seeking to discover whether he had left any trace or hint that might point suspicion to himself. He had gone to the house without telephoning in advance, so that not even Mallow had known he was coming. He wanted it that way.

In response to his bell, Mallow had clicked the latch on the garden gate and again on the door at the foot of the little stair. Not till Walder reached the library itself could Mallow have known who he was. Thereafter they had not been disturbed. It was then about ten o'clock, he remembered —and he and Mallow had talked together for half an hour at least.

Walder winced faintly with shame to think how he had abased himself before his victim. He found grim satisfaction in the knowledge that he had wiped out that shame with a blow at the end, when his anger flamed. The heavy base of the telephone had crushingly obliterated the smooth bald spot on the top of Mallow's head.

The receiver had fallen from the instrument, and Walder vividly remembered how he had listened for a moment to the voice of the operator before he replaced the receiver. He had been trembling with one of his sudden venomous furies, and Mallow lay crumpled forward upon his desk.

There had followed an interval of panic. Then the memory of a murder case he had covered years before prompted his course. And then came an eternity mercifully blotted out from his memory—an eternity in which he labored feverishly, yet with the terrible patience which his task demanded.

When he crept out of the house at dawn there were gulls circling in wide sweeps, high in the sky

— innumerable gulls, swinging around and around above the chimney from which dark and oily smoke still drifted upward through the first bleak gray of morning.

Walder drove his thoughts forward. It had turned warmer a few days after that. The furnace fire in Mallow's house must have been allowed to go out. This morning's *Star* had told the rest. The ashman, taking down the flue-pipe and cleaning out the ash-pit, had discovered Mallow's false teeth, which had survived the fire. He told the butler. The butler telephoned the police. Mallow's dentist had identified the plate. And now the fact of Mallow's murder shrieked in black type across the top of every paper.

By the time Walder reached the further border of the park he felt somewhat reassured. No one knew he had gone to see Mallow. He had left no traces. He had not even betrayed himself by seeking out and destroying his notes which Mallow held; they would be discovered by the administrator of Mallow's estate.

But the fact that he owed Mallow money need not direct attention to himself. Many others owed Mallow money. He was rather pleased with himself for leaving those notes behind. He had even wiped the telephone instrument clean of possible fingerprints, using his handkerchief for the purpose.

The more carfeully he reflected, the more convinced of his own security he became. Many a murder mystery went unsolved—Walder knew this well enough. In this particular case the odds were in his favor since he would be able, through the columns of the *Tribune,* to put out false scents, to turn suspicion along false channels, to obscure the issue as he chose.

He must not do this too openly, he reminded himself. After all, he had the reputation of being a shrewd investigator. He must live up to that reputation.

Yet on the whole, with the first shock dulled, Walder found himself reassured. When he reached the door of Mallow's house, he was almost himself again . . .

Inspector Peake was in charge of the investigation. Walder met Pratt, one of the other *Tribune* men, just coming out the door, and Pratt told him what had happened or had not happened.

"Peake's going through his papers," Pratt explained, "up in the library."

Walder nodded. "Well, I'll go up and see him."

The butler opened the door at his ring, and Walder saw that the man was uneasy, frightened, pale. Peake, he guessed, had been bullying the servants.

Walder said simply, "I've come to see the inspector. I know the way."

The butler was glad to permit him to go upstairs alone.

When the reporter came to the

door of the room in which he had killed Mallow he suffered a momentary shock. Peake, seated at Mallow's desk with his back turned, was displaying just such a bald spot as Mallow had worn. Walder was relieved when the inspector turned and looked at him and said loudly, "Hello, Walder!"

Walder nodded. "You on the case, are you?" he asked.

"Going through his papers," Peake said.

"What's the dope?" Walder asked, and lighted a cigarette.

Peake puffed his lips and opened another drawer of the desk, lifting out a handful of letters and open sheets.

"Killed him here in this room probably," he said. "Then cut him up and burned him in the furnace in the cellar."

"Who?"

"Plenty had reason to. Plenty owed him money. I guess by his books they didn't find him an easy one to owe money to."

Walder hesitated momentarily, then said, "I know that."

Peake looked up quickly. "You borrowed from him too? I'd have thought you had more sense."

Walder grinned feebly. "Had to have it," he said.

"I never knew a reporter yet that lived on his salary," Peake said, frankly contemptuous.

"No line at all?" Walder asked.

"I gave the servants a scare," Peake replied. "Don't think they were in on it. If one was they all were. They stick to the same story. They're a sober lot, and they were all in bed early that night. Butler saw Mallow about half-past nine. That was the last time."

"Must have been some job to burn him up in the furnace," Walder said. "Funny the servants didn't hear the furnace door clang, or the shovel or anything. Must have been a big fire. Heated up the house."

Walder was beginning to find a faint enjoyment in playing his part. He remembered now that the house had indeed become insufferably hot—remembered how, in spite of his care, the furnace door had clanged, the shovel had scraped, the grate had rattled—remembered how he had trembled lest the servants at the top of the house would hear.

"They say they did hear," Peake said. "But they had orders to stay upstairs. Mallow did a lot of things he didn't advertise." He sorted the papers before him. "These look like your notes."

Walder glanced at them. "Yeah!"

Peake studied them, then said sympathetically, "I'll just tear them up. No use letting the executor get after you for this dough. You've paid enough."

"Keep them," Walder said indifferently. His eyes clouded. "I don't give a damn now." He rose. "I'm going to look around the house. Let you know if I dig up anything."

"Nothing here," Peake told

him. "We've looked the place over. But go ahead if you want to."

Walder did go ahead with the slow thoroughness which had always characterized his work. He was rather pleased with his own composure, and when his indolent search was concluded he left the house and returned to the office to write his story.

He wrote at first with care, choosing his words—but after the opening paragraphs were done he began to lose himself in his task. He set about reconstructing the crime, attributing his disclosures to the police, bolstering them with bits of evidence.

It was, Walder explained, an open secret that Mallow was a money lender. This murderer may well have been a debtor rendered desperate by Mallow's exactions. Walder explained in his story that Mallow's interest rates were exorbitant.

He came to the actual murder itself. "It was done," he stated, "in Mallow's office. This was where the two men met—there could have been nothing to take them elsewhere. Mallow was a powerful man. In any struggle he would have given a good account of himself. He would have called out and alarmed the servants.

"Therefore there was no struggle. A shot would have been heard by the servants. A knife would have left bloody traces somewhere. It is probable Mallow was killed by a blow on the head and his body later taken to the cellar and dismembered."

The story won Frame's enthusiastic approval and Walder himself, reading it in the later editions of the paper, could not help being pleased.

But at home that evening he began to have misgivings. It seemed to him that he had made too many suggestions, that he had been too definite in his deductions, that an analytical reader must see that the writer of the story knew those things which he pretended to guess.

After he went to bed he lay awake for a long time, trembling with fear lest in his zeal he had betrayed himself. Sleep, when it came, was fitful and unsatisfying. He began the second day already weary and hollow-eyed.

In the morning papers he found that the police were looking for a man who was known to have come to see Mallow early in the evening of the day he was killed. The butler had seen this man and described him. He had worn, the servant said, a light overcoat of an unusual color, almost yellow. This circumstance awoke memory in Walder. He groped for the key to the puzzle and recollection came to him disturbingly.

That night when he went to Mallow's house—although he had no mind at the time to do that which he later did—he took considerable care to avoid notice. He had twice walked past the front of the house, looking for lights in

the windows. He now remembered that at the corner a man had stopped him to ask a light for his cigarette. This man wore a curiously yellow overcoat.

Walder had only safety matches —he had handed the box to the man and the small flame illumined his face so that Walder was sure he would recognize the other at a second meeting. This man must have left Mallow only a few minutes before. It amused Walder to think the police now sought him.

The fellow would, Walder thought, escape their search. The description was fragmentary and imperfect. A yellow overcoat could so easily be destroyed. If the man were wise he would destroy it and keep his own counsel, thus avoiding unpleasant notoriety. Walder felt sure this was what the other would do.

But when he reached the office he learned that the man had surrendered to the police. "His name's Macklin," Frame explained. "He tells a straight story. He says he left Mallow about a quarter past nine, and the butler saw Mallow after that. Unless Macklin returned later, there's nothing on him."

"If he didn't go back he can probably show where he was," Walder suggested.

"Pratt says he's explained that and the police are checking it," Frame said.

Walder left the office a little later and went again to Mallow's house. The place had a certain attraction for him. As he approached it he noticed two or three gulls circling in the air overhead as they had circled that morning when dark smoke still poured from the spouting chimney. Sight of them made him shudder and he decided not to go into the house after all.

But he met Inspector Peake just coming out and Peake said, "This Macklin—you know about him?"

"Yes."

"We've checked up on him. He's clean. But he says he saw a man in front of the house when he came out who looked pretty wild-eyed. He borrowed a match and saw this chap's face and he says the man looked half-sick and desperate. He was impressed by it at the time—by the man's eyes. Spoke to his wife about it when he got home."

Walder studied his fingers as he lifted the cigarette to his lips. They were steady and unshaken. "Nothing in that, is there?" he suggested.

"The man was hanging around," Peake said.

"Macklin able to describe him?"

"Yes—a full description. We're looking for him now. We'll pick him up in a day or two."

The two men walked downtown together, separating when Walder turned toward his office. Walder felt growing in him a vague anger against the world in general and against the stupidity of Peake in

particular. He gave some space that day to Macklin, ridiculing his story of the wild-eyed man.

"In the first place," he pointed out, "in the sudden flare of a match any man's eyes look wild. In the second place, the description which Macklin gives is vague and full of generalities. It would fit almost any man of medium height—the reader of these lines or the writer of them." He grinned with sardonic satisfaction at this phrase. "The whole incident bears all the marks of an attempt on the part of the police to conceal their own bewilderment."

He proceeded to elaborate on the possibility that Mallow had contrived his own disappearance —that he had destroyed books and papers, removed his false teeth for the double purpose of disguising himself and making his disappearance seem a murder, then stepped out of the door and out of the world which knew him.

He wrote at such length along these lines that Frame protested. "They'd rather read about a *murder,*" he argued. "You don't want to kill this story, do you?"

"This'll make it more of a mystery," Walder insisted. "Besides, I've got some dope. I have an idea this is what happened. I don't believe Mallow was killed at all!"

In the end Frame ran the story, but Walder thought the editor was still doubtful. It seemed to him Frame watched him as though doubts had risen in his mind.

The list of names of Mallow's debtors had come into the office that day. The list would not be printed but Walder's name was on it and he knew Frame had seen it. He began to regret that he had not let Inspector Peake tear up those damning notes.

Walder had another uncomfortable night. It seemed to him, reflecting in the dark solitude of his bedroom with his wife asleep beside him, that he had been much too clever. He regretted that he had treated the Macklin incident so lightly. After all, it was the business of the police to follow up every lead. He could hardly quarrel with them for that.

Yet, as he remembered it, his discussion of Macklin had been almost bitter. Inspector Peake would take it unkindly. Walder had small respect for Peake. He was a blusterer, full of his own importance, but he was also a warm-hearted man where his friends were concerned and he had been decent to Walder. Walder regretted that he had made Peake's task a little harder.

Walder slept very little and when he went to the office next morning his head throbbed and pounded. His nerves were on edge. Outside the railroad station as he crossed the street, the traffic officer looked at him more attentively than Walder thought necessary. He found his forehead bathed with cool sweat, yet the morning was not warm.

He hurried on, glad to be out of

the policeman's sight, wondering whether it was possible that Macklin's description of him had been accurate after all.

In the office, Frame did not at once send him out to work on the Mallow affair, and this puzzled Walder. He read the morning papers at his desk, found in them nothing except the expected vague surmises and conjectures. One man asserted that the police had an astonishing new clue and that an arrest might be expected within forty-eight hours. Walder tried to laugh at this, but again he found himself perspiring.

Frame finally called him in to say that Macklin would be at Police Headquarters at ten o'clock to try to identify a man the police had picked up.

"You'd better go up and see Macklin," he said. "Maybe you can get something out of him the cops missed."

Walder wiped his forehead nervously. "Waste of time to do that," he protested. "Macklin doesn't know any more about it than a dozen others who saw Mallow that day. He just happens to be the last one."

"Well, the last one, whoever it was, killed Mallow," Frame reminded him.

"That wasn't Macklin," Walder said. "The police are satisfied of that."

"Maybe they're just pretending to be satisfied," Frame insisted. "Giving him a chance to hang himself. You'd better see the man anyway."

"There's no point in it," Walder persisted. Then he saw that Frame was looking at him oddly. "But you're the doctor," he said quickly.

He had no intention of confronting Macklin. The man might recognize him and Walder did not want to have to explain that he had been near Mallow's house that night. But though he did not intend to see Macklin he must give Frame the impression that he had.

So he went toward Police Headquarters, intending to go into the press room for a moment, let himself be seen, and then get out. Headquarters was at one end of a square from which there were only two outlets, the courthouse blocking one side.

Walder turned into this square just as Inspector Peake appeared on the steps in front of Headquarters. Walder hesitated and saw the inspector pause as though waiting for someone and then another man came out of the door and Walder recognized him as Macklin.

Walder stepped into the doorway of an office building, went down the stairs to the lower floor and out on a side street. He hurried to the corner and disappeared before the inspector and Macklin came into view. There was a subway kiosk at the curb, and he went down the stairs into the cool damp of the interior and

boarded the first car that came along.

Toward noon he went back to the office. Frame would be expecting him. He told Frame he had arrived at Headquarters just after Macklin left.

Frame said in surprise, "I had Rouse there waiting for you. He kept Macklin around but you didn't come."

Walder looked irritated. "The cop on the corner told me they'd gone. I didn't go inside."

"I think you can get a good story out of Macklin," Frame insisted. "Peake will know where to find him. You'd better sit down and give us a new lead for the final now though. Got anything?"

"I'll figure out something," Walder said, and went to his desk.

Walder's desk was next to the window. The window was open and he stood for a moment, breathing the air which flowed in from the warm slot of the street. He lighted a cigarette and leaned out to drop the match and watch it float swiftly downward to the sidewalk far below.

Frame called to him, "You've got twenty minutes," and Walder sat down at his typewriter. His head throbbed and he still perspired. He felt weak and drained —tried to channel his thoughts into action, tried to discover some new angle of the Mallow case which might serve as a lead.

He began to write, idly, mechanically, his mind far removed from what he put down. It was though he were outside his own body, looking down upon himself with dispassionate scrutiny. He was surprised to see how insignificant he seemed. He no longer cared what happened and this surrender of the spirit was curiously reassuring.

After an interval he heard Frame speaking to someone at the other side of the room. "He's getting out a lead for the next edition. Wait till he's through."

Walder thought Frame might be talking about him. He looked around. Frame was talking to Inspector Peake and another man— Macklin! They stood by the counter in front of the reference department and he saw their eyes turn in his direction.

He turned back to his work. Macklin had seen him, then, at Headquarters, had recognized him, had told Peake. And Peake had tied loose ends together. Peake would want to ask questions. Walder shuddered faintly with sudden nausea. He didn't want to answer the inspector's questions. He was too tired.

He put a fresh sheet into his typewriter and wrote, rapidly, half a dozen lines. When they were done he pulled out the sheet and folded it and called a copy boy. When the boy came Walder said, "Give this to Mr. Frame."

As the boy moved away Walder rose from his chair and put his hand on the window sill by his side. The street waited far below.

Even in the first moment of paralyzed excitement, Frame did not forget to read what Walder had written. Then with an exclamation he handed the sheet to the inspector. Their heads came together above it as they read what Walder had turned in:

Walder, Re. Lead "Mallow."

Ernest Walder, a newspaper reporter, today confessed to the murder of Jeffery Mallow. Walder had borrowed money from the dead man, had paid an exorbitant rate of interest, had sought to persuade Mallow to make some concessions. When Mallow refused, Walder struck him on the head with the telephone, then dismembered the body and burned it.

Walder, after confessing, committed suicide by leaping from a fourth-story window, before he could be arrested.

After a moment, Frame said quickly, "He must have thought you came to arrest him."

The inspector was sobered for a moment into telling the truth. "Rouse said Walder wanted to talk to Mr. Macklin," he confessed. "We were down this way —just happened to come in."

Then he remembered his part and declared, "But I kind of figured Walder did it all the time."

The Saint toasts two of England's greatest women detective-story writers in our next issue—the indefatigable Agatha Christie, pastmistress in the gentle art of mayhem and murder; and the always-scintillating Dorothy L. Sayers, who has done as much as anyone else in the field to lift the level of the mystery tale to its present state of literary development. Faithful followers of THE SAINT *will recall with pleasure the sparkling Messrs. Satterthwaite and Quin story in our very first issue. This should be sufficient recommendation to follow the future adventures of these ratiocinative bloodhounds in "The Coming of Mr. Quin."*

And in "The Fountain Plays" by Miss Sayers you'll find one of the most chilling tales you've ever encountered. It's about a Mr. Spiller who is paying blackmail to keep a certain fact in his past hidden. Suddenly a murder is committed, and— But that's as far as we can go without giving away the plot. Look it up in our next issue for real reading pleasure.

the fool

by . . . Milward Kennedy

Dr. Clements knew beyond any doubt that murder had been committed—but he didn't know that the truth would ruin his plans.

EVERYBODY KNOWS Dr. Clements. Indeed, they know me rather too well. It's a big enough practice geographically, but I've never had patience to butter up the rich old ladies who like to think they are ill, and I can't be interested in bunions and cut fingers and the minor ailments of bungalowers' brats.

People — outsiders — are surprised that I've kept the practice. But I'm a first-rate doctor. The devil of it is that when it comes to making money I'm my own worst enemy, and it's lack of money that has kept me a wretched G. P.

If I had money, I'd give up doctoring and live. I dream of it—or used to. The dream would have come true if only Carl Wright had not jumped to conclusions. The fool!

Does the name Carl Wright ring a faint bell in your memory? No? Then I suppose the affair was only a local nine days' wonder. His wife Elaine committed suicide. She was found in the garage with her face next to the car exhaust pipe. I gave what medical evidence was needed, as I'd done the post-mortem. The jury found no difficulty. Suicide. Nerv-

Many writers have discovered that the combination of murder and medicine is one that's bound to attract readers—if the ingredients are handled with a professional bedside manner. Milward Kennedy has carried the formula a bit further in this brief tour de force—to an unexpected final paragraph.

ous breakdown. They ascribed no blame to Carl.

I didn't see the case through the jury's eyes. I knew too much about Carl, and about Elaine. She wasn't a bad sort. Rather a common little thing—which was the cause of all the trouble. You see it often enough; especially, I'd say, in the literary world. The husband suddenly makes a name, is taken up by people richer and rarer than he has been accustomed to. He can make the grade, but his wife can't. She's worn and dowdy from years of looking after him before he got into the money. He forgets or ignores the cause and just sees the effect. He compares her with this or that smart piece who tells him how wonderful he is.

It was that way with Carl and Elaine, only worse. He had it fixed in his mind that she had been a handicap to him all the years of non-success, and he meant to punish her. She felt just the other way about it. And when he finally began to click, she was thrilled by the prospect of moving into a new world with him. She fancied herself, absurdly enough, as a social light and a sparkling wit.

But she found out—and soon—that Carl had no intention even of introducing her to his new friends. She bought a lot of new dresses, but that was as far as she got. He bought himself a new car, gave her the old one. That was about all. She was expected to live down in their New Jersey bungalow just as before, and have it ready for Carl if and when he chose to give the bright lights a rest.

I've made it plain that Elaine was neither very intelligent nor artistic. But she was highly strung, hysterical. They had no children. I think he blamed her for that too, though he'd have found children the devil of a nuisance both before and after he made good.

She didn't come to me for some time. When she did, it was because she couldn't sleep. I had a talk with her. I told her she needed a psychiatrist instead of an M.D., but she wouldn't hear of that. So I prescribed a sedative.

Then I had a talk with Carl, whom I knew reasonably well. But he pooh-poohed any suggestion that Elaine was in a bad way. He insisted that she was just excitable. That was why he wanted her to stay quietly in the country.

My curiosity was aroused about Carl. I'll admit also that I was glad to have an excuse—a valid one, for once—to look at the bright lights myself. But I did not learn any precise news about Carl's ways. He seemed to be going hot and strong in his new sparkling, bogus circle. But gossip went no further—linked him with no one in particular.

And then Elaine tried to kill herself — or did she? Anyway, Carl found her in time, when he

drove down from town in his car. She was in the garage, with the doors shut and the engine of her car running.

If she was in earnest, she wasn't very clever about it. She knew when he was due. . . . If you ask me, she was putting on a show, to impress him. Carl called me in at once. She wasn't in too bad shape. I talked to her again, but with no more success, about a psychiatrist. And I got her to promise to behave herself — for what that was worth.

The next time I was called in there was no mistake. Elaine's troubles were over.

It was the cleaning woman who found her dead. She noticed the lights still on in the garage, shining through the cracks of its shuttered window. Then she failed to find Elaine in the house. Her bed had not been slept in, but the pillows were gone. By her bedside were her sleeping tablets, her book, her watch. So the woman went to the garage, remembering the other time.

I took a quick look around the place, though I had to be tactful with the police. I talked to the cleaning woman. It was a nice tidy story.

Suicide, said the jury. I did not disagree with them.

But I had a different picture of what happened that night. A very vivid picture.

The little house stood in a clearing among trees that covered the long, gentle slope of a hillside. The clearing was midway down the slope. I could see Carl coming back from New York late at night, driving quietly, avoiding towns and villages, and finally turning into a rough, seldom-used road that curled down through the woods before cutting off his engine—at last walking softly over the pine needles till he came to the fence that bordered his property.

Now he strolled to the front door, let himself in, and listened. Not a sound. He walked quietly to Elaine's bedroom. Again he listened. He opened the bedroom door, and after another pause switched on the light. Perhaps he smiled when Elaine lay there without stirring. She had taken a sleeping tablet. He had talked to me about those tablets. He knew, or thought he knew, their strength.

She would not stir now, or if she did, only go drowsily back to sleep. His next task was to open the back door, then the garage, then return to Elaine. Now he lifted her out of bed, the pillow still under her head.

He carried her down the brick path and laid her gently by her car. She needed to be propped a little higher; so back to the house for another pillow as well as for her slippers. The slippers he scuffled on the path before he put them on her feet.

A moment to look around, to consider, to listen. This was the dangerous moment. He had to switch on Elaine's car and the

lights in the garage, and then go out, closing the door behind him.

There, that was done. Now he had only to slip away to his car, take off the brakes, and let it run silently down the sloping track till it brought him to the high road in the valley. And so—tranquilly—back to New York.

I could see it all so very clearly. Mist lay only over Carl's proceedings in New York. How had he insured against the risks of having no alibi in case something went wrong?

I went to town on that. I'd have enjoyed it even if I hadn't had a serious purpose. It cost a lot of money, but I hoped to get that back, and a lot more. And it wasn't a long job either. It's one thing to hang around for gossip about a man's hidden life and quite another to go all out for the facts. The facts were a glamorous girl friend who lived in Greenwich Village.

So Carl was keeping it quiet. It could scarcely have been for Elaine's sake. He must be afraid of scandal in his bright new world—and yet a scandal was the one least to be feared by a man in his position.

So I decided that I had plenty to discuss with Carl. I went to see him—by appointment—in the apartment he occupied when he wasn't in the Village.

I had a feeling he knew why I had come. There was a strained look about him. I went straight to the point. I thought that the harder I hit him the more he'd pay for my silence.

"It's about Elaine," I said. "I made a mistake in what I told the jury. I thought you should be the first to know."

"Mistake?" he said. He was puzzled.

"Elaine couldn't have walked to the garage," I said, "after the sleeping tablets she'd taken. Out of the question."

He just stared.

"She was carried," I said. "And there's another thing. Suicides don't try the same way twice."

Still he didn't say a word. I didn't know how he was taking it.

"Want any more?" I asked. "Suppose I talk about a house in the Village? And I wonder whether you'll get your alibi if—"

That's as far as I got.

He thought he knew what I was going to say. He guessed that "murder" was coming, because it was murder he had intended. He muttered something and turned his back on me; his hand went up to his mouth.

The fool committed suicide on me.

And all I was going to tell him was that Elaine didn't die of carbon monoxide poisoning but of an overdose of those sleeping tablets. Why else had I made them double strength, except to get Carl into some kind of a jam where it would pay him to keep me quiet? But I'm still a G.P., and with two fewer paying patients. Thanks to Carl Wright—the fool!

the man who killed blackbirds

by . . . Sax Rohmer

In which Bimbashi Baruk unravels perhaps the most ruthless frame-up hatred ever conceived by man.

BIMBASHI BARÛK had an insatiable curiosity concerning his fellow men. In consequence of this Tom Eldon, host of the Bull, at Opley, came to look upon him as a "regular" rarely absent from the corner armchair whenever the bar was open. He had returned to his old quarters at the Bull after an interval of more than a year and seemed to have nothing in particular to do, except that he often went out sketching, so that the cleanly chiseled vaguely Oriental face, old Harris tweed suit, and the stubby briar pipe had become familiar to all Tom's customers. The fact was that Bimbashi Barûk had formed one of a party of officers recalled home to make personal reports after the fall of Tobruk and he was now awaiting return transport to Egypt.

It was here in the Bull, just before closing time on a hot summer's afternoon, that he first set eyes upon the resentful Home Guard.

"Double Scotch," the Home Guard ordered peremptorily.

He wore battle dress and he rested a rifle against the bar while getting out his wallet. A tall well-knit figure gave an impression of youth but the lined dark face and

You have already met Sax Rohmer's off-handedly brilliant Bimbashi Barûk in "Murder Strikes in Lychgate" in a previous issue of THE SAINT. *Here we find the redoubtable bloodhound at the absolute top of his deductive form as he manages to prevent the local gendarmes from committing a ghastly mistake.*

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somber eyes belonged to a man of middle-age, to a man who had suffered much or to one who had drunk too deeply of the cup of life.

As Tom Eldon set a glass before his customer—"I see," came Barûk's pleasant voice, "that they still serve you out with Lee-Enfields down here."

The Home Guard turned. "They do. Does that fact interest you?"

His manner was so provocatively rude that Barûk felt affronted and when he replied he spoke sharply, "I appear to have offended you, sir. But as a professional soldier I am naturally interested in the arms of all the services."

"Oh, I see. You are a regular officer." The man's tone was less offensive but his glance no less mocking. "Yours is a sorry trade, sir. In me you see a most unwilling warrior. Two generations of fools have plunged us into this mess. Under a government of sane men there would be no need for armies. A sane government would ignore the armies and strike at those who directed them."

He swung his rifle over his shoulder. "Having publicly proclaimed these views during the past twenty years I naturally resent being compelled to form part of the bone and muscle."

He went out. Bimbashi Barûk smiled at Tom Eldon. "Agreeable fellow. "Who is he?"

"That's Mr. Peter Gilliam, sir," the landlord replied, glancing at the clock and then going across to bar his door. "I reckon he hates everybody, does Mr. Gillam. Queer, he is, and mad as they're made. He's what they call a mining engineer and he's in charge of those excavations under the hill in the old stone quarries, a bit out of town."

Bimbashi Barûk nodded. "He's not a native then?"

"Not he. Come from foreign parts, I hear. Don't know just where. But he lives in what they call Quarry Cottage on the hillside. Lonely it is—and he's got the prettiest little woman locked up there as I ever set eyes on."

"Locked up?"

"Well, in a manner o' speaking. No society, like. Seems to be frightened of everybody. Aye, they're a queer couple."

Somewhat less than an hour later Bimbashi Barûk found himself in a narrow winding path all but indiscernible because of encroaching nettles, a path which traced an aimless way through a wood of firs. This wood possessed one peculiar and unpleasant feature—it contained a number of dead birds, chiefly blackbirds, in various stages of decay and overrun by wasps. The bimbashi carried water-color equipment and was bound for a spot which he had long determined to try to paint—a pool opening out from a tiny stream, where there were water lilies.

He was aware that this was a

private property but except by rocks, thrushes, squirrels and a rare rabbit, his trespass had never been challenged. The house—Court Oaks—stood at no great distance from the pool but he knew that most of it was locked up, that the grounds were neglected. Dr. Manoel, its wealthy and eccentric occupant, camped out in two rooms, where he resided alone except for a colored manservant.

Presently, through an opening in the trees which he remembered, the lily pool burst into view. He stood still. His abrupt halt had not been occasioned by the loveliness of the pool, however, but by the fact that a man was seated beside it.

He was sitting bolt upright in a split-cane chair beneath a magnificent lime tree. On the grass beside him lay a book.

He was perhaps sixty years of age but possessed a slim figure and saturnine good looks. As he wore no hat the sun quickened his thick wavy hair to silver, accentuating the yellowness of his skin. Heavy eyebrows, mustache and a small pointed beard remained dark and he wore a white linen suit — so that, recalling spoken descriptions, the bimbashi concluded that he was looking at Dr. Manoel, owner of Court Oaks.

And Dr. Manoel, without relaxing that rigid pose, sat holding a gold watch extended before him, his eyes fixed upon it and his expression one of such extreme horror that Bimbashi Barûk became physically chilled. Although Dr. Manoel's hand was steady, immovable as the rest of his body, perspiration shone upon his high forehead and he presented a perfect study of one facing imminent and inescapable destruction!

As he stood there Bimbashi Barûk heard a dull familiar thud. The gold watch fell to the grass. Dr. Manoel came to his feet like a puppet jerked upright on a wire. A speck of blood gleamed, a living ruby, on his wet forehead—and he pitched forward and lay, arms outstretched. The crack of a rifle shot echoed around the valley and rooks rose, filling the air with their alarm calls.

The first shock of this dreadful killing being conquered—for the fact that he had witnessed an assassination was unmistakable—Bimbashi Barûk gained the victim's side in a period computable in seconds. Barbed wire intervened but the bimbashi had learned all that one may know about barbed wire in Libya. Breathing rapidly he stood for a moment looking down. Then, twisting about, he stared up the slope.

From this point of view, owing to close-set timber, no more than a corner of the east wing of Court Oaks was visible. Otherwise a stone cottage on the hillside beyond seemed to be the only building in sight. There was, however, ample natural cover. Nothing stirred but the rooks above. Their

cries and the shriek of a hidden jay alone disturbed a hot silence.

Dr. Manoel had been killed by a first-class marksman. The bullet had passed clean through his brain, back to front. Death must have been swift and painless as that inflicted by a guillotine. His watch lay, dial upward, near his clenched hand. It recorded that the hour was 3:03 P.M.—summer time. The book on the grass beside the chair was a richly bound copy of Cardinal Newman's "Dream of Gerontius."

Although the bimbashi wasted no time in running up to Court Oaks — an ugly rambling stone mansion of mid-Victorian design —he met with infuriating delay in gaining admittance. The house presented every evidence of desertion. Many of the windows were shuttered and others clearly belonged to unoccupied rooms. The drive was liberally decorated with thistles and the main entrance, its rusty bellpull reluctant to function, had long forgotten the smell of paint. A sepulchral note, deep within the house, responded to his ringing.

At last came footsteps. A man, whom he judged to be a mulatto, opened the door. He was dressed in a sort of livery with black trousers and a striped linen jacket —and his face, yellow like his master's, bore an habitual expression of hopeless despair.

"Are you Dr. Manoel's servant?" the bimbashi asked sharply.

"Yes, I am José. What do you wish? The doctor is out." José had a slight accent and spoke almost tonelessly. The effect was that of a very old gramaphone record.

"Did you hear a shot a few minutes ago?"

"Yes. The doctor is shooting rabbits, I suppose."

"Does he often shoot rabbits?"

"Often. We eat many rabbits."

Bimbashi Barûk fixed an analytical regard upon the man's dull dark eyes. But he could read nothing in them.

"Dr. Manoel has been attacked. My name is Major Barûk. Show me the telephone."

José inclined his head and led the way along a gloomy and shuttered passage to an even darker alcove, which had the fusty smell of a place where daylight is unknown. Here stood a telephone.

And so in this way the outer world was notified of the death of Dr. Manoel and on that sunny afternoon the neglected grounds of Court Oaks became peopled by unfamiliar figures — Inspector Horley and Dr. Whittington, both of whom the bimbashi had met before, and several others who were strangers. Police on motorcycles were soon weaving in and out of that maze of narrow lanes which embraced the grounds of Court Oaks. There was a sharp brush when the inspector suggested that Bimbashi Barûk had taken no steps to apprehend this mysterious assassin.

"Might I inquire," said the

bimbashi smoothly, "short of throwing a cordon around the neighborhood what I could have done? Being but one and indivisible this maneuver offered me certain difficulties."

In fact Inspector Horley was in a bad humor. It rankled in his memory that the bimbashi had once succeeded in unraveling a local mystery where he himself had failed. So that, at the earliest opportunity which he could decently accept, the bimbashi withdrew. He had gathered certain information, however, which dictated his course when he left Court Oaks.

He went uphill toward that stone cottage which he had seen as he stood beside the dead man on the edge of the pool. It proved to be reached by a bridle path which branched off from a lane winding around the hill crest. And here he passed a constable standing beside a bicycle. A board at the corner bore the words:

PRIVATE
To Quarry Cottage Only

The place, on close inspection, looked well cared for. The door was newly painted and its brasswork shone in the sunlight. Masses of pink roses rambled over its porch. Bimbashi Barûk rang the bell. A sound of movement followed, there were heavy footsteps and the resentful Home Guard opened the door. He had discarded his uniform and wore blue overalls. At sight of the bimbashi, his large deep-set eyes lighted up with that look of mockery.

"Hullo," he remarked. "*You* here again!"

Bimbashi Barûk nodded, smiling. "And I must warn you, Mr. Gillam, that the police are close behind me."

"The police?" Gillam's expression was one of authentic misunderstanding. "Why the police?" His expression altered—a dreadful possibility seemed to have presented itself. "You don't mean that something has happened to my wife?"

Bimbashi Barûk shook his head. His smile grew broader and became a happy smile. "Have no fear on that score."

Gillam's eloquent eyes registered another change of mind. "Then what the devil do you want?"

"I want to come in for a chat. I am called Major Barûk and I believe we shall have all our work cut out to save you from arrest."

At that Gillam's habitual expression of intolerant mockery returned. "You amuse me, Major. Come in by all means."

He led the way into a sort of workshop-study right off the porch. There were laden bookshelves, a desk littered with papers and blueprints and on a side table the bimbashi noted a drawing board to which a partially completed plan was pinned. Under

one window he saw a bench where a model of a complicated piece of mechanism seemed to be in process of evolution. Peter Gillam, whose hands were oily, picked up a rifle and peered into the barrel.

"Sit down," he said casually, "I have a job to finish."

"Cleaning the Lee-Enfield?"

"Cleaning the darned thing, as you correctly observe. I was ticked off today by a certain sergeant on the pretext that my rifle was dirty. The fact is that I happen to be the best shot in the platoon and my arrival has put this gentleman's nose out of joint. I am now assuring myself that the rifle is *clean.*"

The bimbashi took out his pipe and pouch. "Do you mind if I smoke?"

"Not at all."

As he began to fill his briar, watching this unusual man whom fate had thrown across his path, Bimbashi Barûk observed an odd thing. A bee had flown in at an open window and was blindly endeavoring to fly out again through a pane of glass. Peter Gillam laid his rifle on the bench, captured the bee and wafted it on its way into the sunshine.

"A fellow worker, Major. We must help one another." He sat down. "And now—what's it all about?"

"May I ask if we are alone?"

"Quite. My wife has cycled into Moreton Harbor to buy our weekly rations. Why?"

Bimbashi Barûk replaced his pouch and struck a match. "I am glad. You see, a charge of murder is hanging over your head."

"Murder?" Gillam's mocking voice robbed the word of its significance.

"Exactly. Did you hear a shot recently?"

"Yes—that is, within the last half hour. Probably that swine Manoel shooting blackbirds."

"Shooting blackbirds? What for?"

The match burned down to the bimbashi's fingers and he dropped it.

"Just wanton destruction. Sits at an open window, picking them off. Slaughters them for fun."

"*Slaughtered,* Mr. Gillam, not slaughters."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that Dr. Manoel was murdered in his own grounds at almost exactly two minutes past three."

Peter Gillam crossed the room and locked the door. "I begin to understand," he said, returning to his chair. "Please give me the facts."

Bimbashi Barûk lighted his pipe. "They are simple enough. Dr. Manoel was shot through the head as he sat by the lily pool. Several windows of this cottage command the spot at a range of little more than two hundred yards. I gather that you have never troubled to disguise your dislike of Dr. Manoel and it seems

that he distrusted you to the extent of asking for police protection."

"What!" Gillam stood up. "He asked for police protection against *me?*"

The bimbashi, using the end of a pencil, pressed down burning tobacco in his pipe bowl. "He does not seem to have *named* you—but the police apparently have no doubt respecting the person implied."

"They suspect *me!*" Gillam resumed his seat, watching his visitor. "And you found me with a rifle actually in my hands!"

Bimbashi Barûk nodded, fixing a steady regard upon the drawn somber face. "As time is by no means on our side perhaps you would like to make your position in the matter more clear."

"Do I understand, Major, that you are acting for the police?"

"Certainly not. My presence on the spot was accidental—perhaps providential."

"You mean—you saw the crime committed?"

"I was less than twenty paces from Dr. Manoel when he fell. May I take it, Mr. Gillam, in the first place, that you did not regard the doctor as you regard Hitler and Mussolini?"

Peter Gillam smiled grimly. "You may take it that I hated him more than I hate either Hitler or Mussolini. Nevertheless I didn't shoot him. But I recognize the fact that I have no alibi, of course. His having asked for police protection practically pins the thing to me."

"Why did you hate him?"

Gillam hesitated. Then, "As well tell you as tell it in court," he said, "so listen. For two and a half years Juan Manoel treated Antoinette as neither you or I would treat a mongrel dog."

"Who is Antoinette?"

"My wife. She was Manoel's wife at that time. I was young and hard working. I had a small business in San Domingo, which brought in a meager living. Antoinette and I were engaged. We should have been married in three months, when her family—she is of old French stock—found out."

"Found out what?"

Peter Gillam stood up again and stared through the window. He had heard a car in the lane above. He replied slowly as if choosing his words:

"The de Charnys—my wife's people—and the Manoels, their near neighbors, came to the West Indies in the days of Henry Morgan. They had always prided themselves on their family and their inheritance. My father was a British civil servant. I was born in Devon and I graduated from Merton. What they found out is this—that I had no money and that my paternal grandfather was a convict." He twisted around to face the bimbashi and his strange eyes seemed to glow.

"The engagement was broken. Antoinette was forced into marriage with Manoel, the second

wealthiest man on the island and thirty years her senior. She never loved him—and he never allowed her to forget that she had loved me.

"I left San Domingo. I thought Antoinette shared her family's prejudices. I was a fool—a coward. It was more than two years later, in Mexico, that I found out my mistake. Manoel had property there and I was silver mining. By accident we met again. I found that Tony—I mean Antoinette—was leading a dreadful life. He tortured her—she was a nervous wreck. I found out something else—that she still loved me." He smiled, shrugged his shoulders. "In plain English we bolted."

"And then?"

"Manoel, the swine—oh! I hate him no less dead than alive—got his divorce and we were married in the States. But he used his wealth and his influence to try to ruin me. Time and time again, in the years that followed, he pulled wires and brought me down.

"Once, when I was flat out, he tried to get Tony to go back to him. I settled the matter with my bare hands and he had evidence of assault. That made things worse. When the war started, being a Quixotic lunatic, I came home and they turned me over to the Ministry of Supply."

"That is why you are here?"

"Just that. This cottage belongs to the Court Oaks estate—which was unoccupied. I leased it. A month later Manoel bought Court Oaks!"

A bell rang.

"The police," said Gillam and looked out of the window. "Tony is with them!"

As Gillam crossed and unlocked the door his wife stepped in from the porch, followed by Inspector Horley and a police sergeant. The bimbashi had a glimpse of a small and girlishly slight figure, quick but graceful of movement, of a vivacious face characterized by a complexion peachlike in the Oriental sense and lighted by dark blue eyes whose expression conjured up the image of a gazelle. Hair of dull gold presented a mass of close feathery curls.

"Peter, dear!" she cried and ran to her husband. "Whatever has happened? What do the police want to—" She broke off as Bimbashi Barûk appeared behind Gillam.

"Major Barûk. This is my wife."

The bimbashi bowed and Antoinette Gillam forced a welcoming smile.

Inspector Horley addressed Gillam. "I have a few questions to ask you, Mr. Gillam, regarding the death of Dr. Manoel. After which I must request you to come with me to Moreton Harbor for further inquiries."

He paused. Mrs. Gillam, her delicate color fading, had tottered

to a chair, supported by her husband.

"Peter," she whispered. "*Peter!*" Her dark blue eyes seemed to grow black with emotion. "Oh, my dear!"

"It appears to me, Barûk, to be a clear case." Colonel Brown-Maple, the chief constable, stared gloomily from a window of his car at one of the loveliest landscapes in the West Country. "Here's this fellow, Gillam—brilliant at his job and a gentleman as far as that goes. But kinked, definitely kinked.

"He's a dead shot. He has a rifle in his possession. He's alone in his house at the time and his house overlooks the lily pool. So I can't really see what evidence there is for the defense. Sudden impulse, perhaps. Tragic story. The eternal triangle. Sorry for his wife. Pretty little woman. Most attractive. Fatally so."

Bimbashi Barûk smoked. Twenty-four hours had elapsed since the death of Juan Manoel. Peter Gillam had been detained for the crime.

"Manoel," the colonel went on, "was a queer fish admittedly. But he had pots of money and influence. Why he bought Court Oaks in order to live in two rooms I don't know. He was allowed to retain some firearms for dealing with vermin, although everything had been confiscated except stuff issued to Home Guards. Shot a lot, I hear. Funny notion, because we have learned that he had only a short time to live. Angina pectoris. Harley Street had warned him the next attack would be the last."

"Another mysterious feature," murmured the bimbashi, "is why he asked for police protection."

"That should be clear enough. You're a hot man at this sort of thing. He suddenly discovered who his neighbor was! Events proved him right too. You say you have found the bullet. Was it fired from a Lee-Enfield?"

"I think there's no doubt of it. But I want you to form your own opinion—and here we are."

A police sergeant opened the door of Court Oaks and smartly saluted the chief constable.

"Anything you want me to see inside, Barûk?"

"Not at the moment, Colonel. Let's walk down to the pool."

But when, passing through unfurnished echoing rooms, and going out by way of a French window onto a weed-grown terrace, they began to descend the slope, Colonel Brown-Maple pulled up, shading his eyes against the sun.

"What the devil's that stuck on a tree, Barûk?"

Projecting from the trunk of a magnificent lime, beneath which the cane chair still stood, an object appeared, which resembled a white disk—which, indeed it was.

"That is an alibi, Colonel."

The chief constable faced Bimbashi Barûk, and his prominent

eyes seemed to be more prominent than usual. "An alibi! What the deuce do you mean?"

"Allow me to explain." Walking to the tree, the bimbashi pointed. "A round piece of wood, about the diameter of a human skull, and painted white. It is attached to the side of the tree by means of a rod. This rod fits into a slot which I found already cut in the bark."

"You say you found a slot there?"

"Yes. I assumed that some similar device had been used before and so I extemporized this target. Its position, immediately over the chair, corresponds to the head of a man seated there — and the chair, as you can judge from the marks in the turf, always stood on the same spot."

"But you are merely confusing me, Barûk. Do you mean to say that — hullo!" He adjusted his monocle. "Your target is holed!"

"I know," said the bimbashi. "I fired a shot through it this morning."

"What the devil for?"

"Let's walk around the pool and I will show you."

In a frame of mind betwixt mystification and annoyance the chief constable followed Bimbashi Barûk to the trunk of one of several fine conifers which rose, mastlike, from the farther bank of the pool. A cardboard target was pinned to this tree, pierced by a single shot mark.

"Outer—six o'clock," muttered the colonel. "Isn't this the bullet that passed through the wooden disk over there?"

"The same. And now, note the tree trunk as I found it before I attached my target."

He removed the square of cardboard. The bark behind it was pockmarked with bullet holes over an area of no more than ten inches in diameter!

"What the devil?"

"On finding this I knew that *someone* had been practicing from a range of little more than a hundred yards to judge from the penetration. Now if you will note the general direction of the bullet holes and then glance back up the slope, it will occur to you that if one of those bullets is that which passed through Dr. Manoel's brain, it could not very well have been fired from Quarry Cottage."

Solemnly now the colonel inspected the marks, then turned and stared up the slope toward Court Oaks. It was possible, from this point, to see Quarry Cottage but fairly obvious that it lay outside the line of fire.

The bimbashi spoke in a low voice. "When Dr. Manoel died I heard the thud of the bullet striking but I was uncertain of the exact point of impact. Having obtained your permission — after Horley had detained Gillam — I came and searched. Then I remembered the blackbird shooting of which Gillam had spoken. The servant José told me that it took place from Dr. Manoel's bedroom

window at the top of the east wing.

"After several experiments I fixed the wooden disk in its present position. And from the open window of the east wing, with a borrowed rifle, I fired a shot through it. You saw where my shot registered on the tree."

"Barûk," said the colonel, "I believe you have saved the life of an innocent man. But who is the guilty man?"

The bimbashi watched him for a moment and his regard grew dreamy. Then, "Dr. Manoel," he replied.

"*Dr. Manoel!* But—"

"Remember his record, Colonel —his insensate cruelty, his perverted family pride. Then remember that he was robbed of his wife—whom he tortured mentally. I believe his latter years were entirely devoted to that man's ruin and the ruin of the woman who had married him. Let's return to the house."

"But—"

"Remember — it is important for us to understand his motives —that he knew he had only a short time to live. When Gillam took Quarry Cottage Dr. Manoel —who probably had Gillam's movements watched—immediately bought Court Oaks. What for? To be conveniently placed for his purpose."

"What *was* his purpose?"

"To bring Gillam to the scaffold."

"What do you say?" he said.

They had reached the terrace and Bimbashi Barûk pushed open a French window. "If you will be good enough to follow, Colonel, I will lead the way to the room from which Dr. Manoel carried out his target practice."

The room at the corner of the east wing had evidently been used as a bedroom. One window commanded a view of the hillside. Staring out of it Colonel Brown-Maple saw a policeman apparently searching for something in the little garden of Quarry Cottage. The other window overlooked the lawn sloping down to the lily pool.

Both windows were partially obscured by masses of untrimmed ivy which had climbed as high as the roof. A rifle lay on the window ledge of the southern window. Court Oaks had stone walls of dungeonlike thickness. The only other object on the ledge was a cheap alarm clock.

"So this was the shooting gallery, eh?"

"Yes, this was it, Colonel. Whether Manoel shot blackbirds because he hated them or just as a blind I don't know. But from here he did his serious target practice."

The colonel examined the rifle and then turned to Bimbashi Barûk. "Was this the weapon used?"

"No. That is the one I borrowed for my experiment. My discovery of the weapon used was

due to a lucky accident. Since Manoel had a resident servant I wondered why he wanted an alarm clock. Trying to pick up the clock I found that it was screwed to the ledge. The problem became more odd than ever. Next I discovered that some sort of attachment went down through the base. Accordingly I borrowed tools and removed the oak panel below the ledge. I will lift it out and show you what I found there."

The bimbashi did so and Colonel Brown-Maple stooped, peering into a deep cavity at the end of which, a certain amount of light was visible.

"Formerly a ventilating shaft but the grille has been taken out." The bimbashi directed the ray of a torch into the gap. "A Lee-Enfield, clamped down to an oak beam. There is a simple counterweight fixture attached to the striker of the clock above. The rifle is trained accurately on the target you saw just now and its barrel is concealed by the ivy."

He stood upright. So did Colonel Brown-Maple. The two men stared silently at each other for a moment.

"Unlikely to be discovered," the bimbashi added, "until Gillam had paid the penalty. From this window, Manoel could watch all that occurred at Quarry Cottage and choose his time. His preoccupation with an after-life may have been real or merely another pose. The clock was set to strike at three."

"But he was actually shot—"

"Two minutes later. Quite so. I understand now the agony of suspense in which I found him. By some oversight which we cannot hope to explain he forgot to put the clock right. It is just two minutes slow."

Banish the idea that Simon Templar—popularly known as The Saint—stole only those things that could be converted into six-figure value. In THE PEARLS OF PEACE, our next Saint story, he commits the most trivial theft of his career—he literally "steals pennies from a blind man" . . . and he's prouder of it than any larceny in an epic list!

hair of his head

by . . . John Creasey

The murderer struck at night and left no clues—except a few short strands of hair which, woven together, made a noose for his neck.

THE WOMAN SLEPT with one arm gleaming softly in the gentle light which came from the street lamp outside. The house was silent. No one moved in the street and only the one light glowed.

The woman stirred.

A faint sound came from the passage outside; another followed. In the gloom, the handle of the door turned silently. The door opened with a faint squeak. A man appeared on the threshold, a big, dark shape but for his face, which showed as a pale blur. He took two slow steps into the room and paused, smoothing down his hair with a nervous gesture.

The woman in bed stirred again.

The bed was against one wall and the woman's face was turned toward the window. The man could see her long, dark hair and could also see that she was young. He crept nearer, one hand outstretched, the other by his side. In that hand was a hammer; the steel head gleamed in the faint light. He drew closer, until he could see the woman's face, serene and lovely in repose; a single diamond ring on her engagement finger glinted.

The woman lay still. The man stood over her, his face set and

There is no chase in this story, no gunplay, no violence at all on the part of the London police. But there is plenty of drama—the kind which is constantly waged in detective laboratories to prove that there is little chance for a killer to escape, no matter what pains he takes to cover his tracks.

hard, lips slightly parted. He raised the hammer above her head. He held it, poised; and now his eyes glittered and the breath rasped between his lips. She kept quite still, her forehead pale and creamy, long dark lashes touching her cheeks.

The man brought the hammer down savagely.

There was a dull, crunching noise. The woman's body moved, as if convulsed. A harsh, sobbing sound escaped the man's lips, and he struck again and again and again.

The man averted his eyes from the face of the woman he had killed, and clawed at her hand, pulling the ring off. Then he turned away and went to the dressing-table, forcing open a jewel box. He took out other things—pendants, brooches, and a small necklace—wrapped them in a handkerchief, and slipped them into his pocket. Next, he opened a handbag and took out the notes, leaving the loose silver. He searched the dressing-table and the wardrobe until he found a cash-box. He forced it open with a screwdriver; a thick wad of notes lay there, held together with a rubber band.

He pocketed these and crept away.

The house and the street were silent. . . .

Chief Inspector Roger West of New Scotland Yard pulled up in his car outside "Greywings," Lambert Road, Wimbledon, and looked at the house. Three cars were already parked in the long narrow drive. A crowd of curious people hung about the gates, but none ventured near as West got out of the car and approached the front door on foot.

It was a pleasing, red-brick house with a long, trim lawn. A constable stood on the porch, helmet in his hand, scratching his grey hair. He jammed the helmet back sharply when he saw the tall compact figure of the Yard man.

"Good morning, sir!"

"Morning. Is Sergeant Sloan inside?"

"Yessir."

"Thanks." West went in and hurried up the wide stairs. Another constable stood by an open door on the landing. Inside, five men were working and the woman still lay on the bed. There was a red mess on the pillow, and West's eyes narrowed as he looked at it.

A man took a flash photograph of the wardrobe. Two others were brushing over the articles on the dressing-table with grey dusting powder, in search of fingerprints. Another, a big, heavily-built man with short fair hair and keen blue eyes, looked up from the rifled cash-box which he was examining.

"Hello, Bill," said Roger West. "What have you got?"

"Damn all," grunted Sergeant Sloan. "I'd like to get the devil who did this job. Look!" He pointed to a photograph standing

in a frame on the dressing-table. It was of a young and lovely woman, her eyes glowing with vitality. "That's what she *was* like."

West grunted.

"Can't find a thing to help," said Sloan. "He wore gloves—"

"He?"

"Well, the killer did—and this isn't a woman's job," said Sloan. "There are only two sets of prints in the room—the woman's and the maid's. The maid's at home sick, and has been for several days. The woman—"

"What's her name?"

"Randall—Lilian Randall. She was going to be married next month. Her fiance's abroad—I've made a note to have that checked. There's a letter from him, postmarked Rome, which only arrived yesterday. He's on a Government mission, so we can find out whether he's still there easily enough."

"Where did you get all this information?"

"The cleaning woman—a Mrs. Clegg. She's in the kitchen, brewing gallons of tea and fainting in between each cup." Sloan sounded bitter. "Usually Miss Randall and her maid are here night and day, but the maid went sick and Miss Randall sent her home."

"Any idea what time it happened?"

"Old Renny's been here, and he's as good a police surgeon as any. He says it was between midnight and three o'clock. You don't need telling how it happened—and the hammer's there." Sloan pointed to a heavy hammer lying on a piece of brown paper.

"Mrs. Clegg took one look and said it's the one she uses for coal. Then she fainted."

West moved restlessly about the room. "How did the killer get in?"

"By a downstairs window, at the back. It had been forced. Amateur job—no professionalism here, so we can't pick up an old lag for it. It's going to be a sticky job, Roger."

"Any idea what's missing?"

"Jewels and money." Sloan pointed to the woman's hand. "See that scratch on her engagement finger? That's where the swine tore it off."

"Nice creature," said West grimly. "We'll be able to pick up a description of some of the jewels and maybe numbers of some of the missing notes, so we aren't so clueless as you think. I—what's that?"

He was staring at the hammer, and went forward quickly and bent down on his knee. He took a pair of tweezers from his pocket. "Has this been photographed?"

"Yes—everything has."

"Good!" West took something between the tweezers and stood up with it; it was a grey hair, about two inches long. "The sun caught it," he explained. "Seen any more of these about?"

"No, I can't say I have. That's not a woman's hair either."

"Probably not. Let's have another look around."

They found four more grey hairs, all about the same length. There was nothing else to give them any help.

The body was taken away in a police ambulance, and West drove Sloan to Scotland Yard. Several messages were waiting in his office. The dead woman's fiance was still in Rome; the maid's story as well as Mrs. Clegg's had been checked and found accurate. The dead woman's solicitor was anxious to speak to West, who put through a call at once.

The solicitor's voice was old, worried. "Ah, Inspector! I've been wanting to talk to you. This business—dreadful! And so tragic in many ways. Miss Randall was preparing a will—she was quite wealthy, you know, and I always told her she *must* make one. But there was—"

"So there's no will?" West said sharply. "Who inherits?"

"Well—over the telephone—but perhaps it will do no harm. There are four relatives—three cousins and an uncle. The three cousins are on her mother's side, the uncle on the father's. The uncle gets half, the cousins share the other half. That is controlled by the poor child's father's will. He was very careful, very—"

"I'd like you to send me a note of the names and addresses of all four," said West. "As soon as you can."

"But they are irreproachable, all of them! They can't possibly be suspected."

"Just routine," said West. He rang off and grinned. "A scandal-fearing lawyer who sounds about ninety! We might pick something up there, Bill. Let's go along to the lab, to study those hairs."

In the small laboratory, used for special work with the microscope, he took out a tiny envelope containing the five hairs and shook them on to a piece of stiff white paper. Then he adjusted the double-view microscope, so that both he and Sloan could see. Carefully, he placed one of the hairs on a glass slide and put it into position.

The hair looked thick and coarse, with little ridges. The root was swollen and bulb-like, the other end was clean cut.

"He's had a hair-cut recently," mused Roger. "Now wait a minute." He took one of the other hairs and, using a tiny razor-sharp knife, cut one hair slantwise, so that a good section showed. He placed both pieces on the slide, where they looked raw.

"See that!" Sloan exclaimed. "The pigmentary cells are black!"

"Jet black," agreed West. "That means our man's in the greying process, not old; it puts him at middle-age. There's no set rule, but not many men of less than forty are as solidly grey as those hairs suggest. Yet our man's probably solidly grey, or there'd have been some dark hairs as well

as these. Where are we? Age between thirty-five and forty-five, say, and he's just had a hair-cut. Let's have a look at the roots."

West put another hair on the slide, and now there were three roots, close together.

"Hmm. Not smooth, are they? They seem to be to the naked eye, but under the lens they're rough and look almost like tiny balls of sand. We're getting on, because that makes our boy fat."

"Fat?" echoed Sloan.

"Remember your police college days! The rubbish they taught you there isn't all wasted. When human head hairs get rough-rooted like these, it generally means that the owner perspires freely. Fat men are more likely to sweat than thin ones."

"Good Lord!"

"And don't forget that perspiration is absorbed by the hair where it grows thickly. In thin spots, the perspiration has a more pronounced effect on the roots—just like this. And as these hairs came out so freely, it suggests that they came from near a thin spot. They're too long for the nape of the neck or the temples, so they probably come from the edges of a bald patch."

Sloan drew back from the microscope. "Roger," he exclaimed, we've almost got a picture of the man! On the plump side, thirty-five to forty-five, with dark hair turning grey, and a bald spot."

"Plus a recent hair-cut," said West. "Now if one of the cousins or the uncle measures up, we should be able to do some quick work. If they *all* measure up—"

"We have to have some luck," said Sloan. "Shall I call the lawyer?"

"His list of probable runners will soon be here," said West. "Let's wait for it."

The list arrived an hour later. Sloan was in West's office and he grabbed the envelope. "Your old man's good," he said. "Age, appearance and general data about each one, almost as complete as a dossier. And—" Sloan could not hide his intense excitement. "The three cousins are all in the early twenties. The uncle is forty-one!"

"Let's go see him," said West.

Mr. Arthur Randall smoothed down his greying hair, and his hand strayed for a moment over the bald patch on top. He was a big man, with heavy jowls and flabby cheeks, and his coat stretched tightly over his considerable paunch.

He lived in a flat in a service block, near the heart of London. Everything about the flat was expensive and in good taste, and Randall, who lived alone, was polite and apparently anxious to help.

"Yes, I've just heard, Inspector. Pool Lilian! You must catch the devil! I understand from the solicitor that her valuables were stolen. You're not safe, these

days, there are so many violent criminals about. The police *must* patrol the streets better."

"We have our moments and get some results, Mr. Randall," said West drily. "But we need help—and in this case we particularly need yours."

Randall looked startled. "Of course—anything I can do."

"Thanks." West was hearty. "It's really quite a small thing, but it matters a great deal. We'd like a hair of your head."

Randall gaped. *"What?"*

"Just a hair of your head," said West. He leaned forward quickly and plucked a hair off the shoulder of Randall's dark coat. "That'll do, I think. Perhaps you'll come with us to Scotland Yard while we're examining it."

"Come with you?" Randall's face blanched. "You've no right —there's no reason! Are you suggesting that I—?"

West said mildly, "We're just checking, Mr. Randall. You see, a grey hair about this length was found on the hammer with which your niece was killed. Hairs are remarkable things; they tell you so much if you know what to look for, and they're like fingerprints—no two heads of hair exactly the same. So, put our minds at rest."

Randall cried, "It's an outrage! I won't come! I tell you—"

"I thought you wanted to help," said West. "But stay here, Mr. Randall—I don't mind. Of course, the hair on the hammer and this hair may not be from the same head. On the other hand—"

Randall was sweating freely and kept passing his hand over his hair; a few fell onto his coat.

"It can't be! I swear it can't be! It's a terrible mistake."

"I hope it is," said Roger. "We'll be seeing you, sir."

A few minutes later, down in the street Roger said, "Not much doubt about this, Bill. You take one end of the street and I'll take the other. If he doesn't come out within twenty minutes, carrying a suitcase and heading for a taxi, I'll be as surprised as if the hair off his coat doesn't tally with those we found. If he puts up a fight, hit him."

Randall appeared in exactly twelve minutes. He carried two suitcases from the block of flats to a taxi. He was inside the taxi when Sloan reached him from one side and West from the other. He gaped but was too dumbfounded to protest as they climbed in.

"Nice of you to give us a lift," Sloan said to Randall. "Going on a little holiday? Mind if we have a look inside your suitcase?"

Randall didn't speak.

The jewels and the money were tucked in the bottom of one of the cases. . . .

The hairs from Arthur Randall's head were identical with those found in his niece's room.

Both Roger West and Sloan were at Wandsworth Jail, two months later, when Randall went for his last walk.

the high cost of dying

by . . . Edwin Baird

The murderer had a perfect plan that could not fail—but he forgot that the cost of corpses was too high for his small account.

THE MAN who kills the woman he loves usually acts in a flare of passion, but when Charles Elstin murdered the woman he loved he did it deliberately, with cold calculation.

He was headed for her apartment now with a revolver in his pocket, and all else he needed was a pair of gloves. He chose an obscure haberdashery in a distant part of town, for he was taking no chances with the police and their scientific crime laboratory.

A dark-eyed girl with sleek black hair waited on him.

"Is there anything else?" she asked. "Neckties, shirts, handkerchiefs? We are giving a customer's certificate this week with every dollar purchase. Each certificate has a trade or cash value."

"This is all I want," he said, and paid for the gloves and walked out.

He walked circuitously to a streetcar line and rode to the woman's apartment, a good ten miles away.

He did not enter by the front door. He went through an alley and climbed the fire escape.

He saw her through the window, seated at a table, reading a book. Her back was turned to

So many hundreds of short tales about crime and detection have come from Edwin Baird's prolific typewriter that even he does not recall the exact number. He has been referred to as the modern O. Henry—and after reading this brief story you will probably agree that the title is well deserved.

the window. She did not see him.

It was a warm evening and the window stood open. He slid over the sill and into her room. He made no sound. She did not move. Then he took the gloves from his pocket and put them on and wiped the revolver with his handkerchief.

Silently he stepped across the thick rug and stood behind her chair. Absorbed in her book, she was still unaware of his presence.

Suddenly he said, "Hello, Marlene!"

Had his gun exploded, she could not have been more violently startled.

"Charles! How on earth. . . ." And then she saw the open window. She stood up, facing him. "What is the meaning of this, Charles?"

"This," he said, and pointed his gun at her.

Before she could utter another sound his gloved forefinger squeezed the trigger and sent a bullet through her heart.

The gun didn't make much noise. Anyway it didn't matter, for in another minute he was out of the room and back down the fire escape.

And in another hour he was climbing still another fire escape and entering another room.

A man sat in this room before a typewriter beneath a shaded lamp. His left hand rested on the typewriter keys, his right hung down beside him, and he was reading something he had typed on a sheet of yellow paper.

"Stay exactly where you are," Elstin told him.

The man looked up quite calmly. "Oh, hello, Charlie. What brings you here—"

He got no further. A bullet crashed through his right temple, killing him instantly.

Still wearing his gloves, Elstin curled the dead man's right hand around the butt of the gun and allowed the hand to drop back alongside the chair. Then he rolled the slip of paper from the machine and typed on another sheet:

I killed Marlene Caldwell tonight because she broke her promise to marry me. She wanted to marry Charles Elstin. Now I am going to kill myself.

Charles Elstin surveyed his work and saw that all was well. The police would examine the fatal bullets and find both had been fired from the gun in the dead man's hand. The typewritten note would tell the rest.

Charles Elstin went home, burned the gloves, and went to bed with a clear conscience. He had murdered the "only woman" because she had jilted him. He had also murdered the "other man," and so adroitly had he committed both murders that nobody would ever suspect him.

At breakfast the next morning he was reading an account of the "murder and suicide" when his

servant entered the room and said:

"Two gentlemen from the police to see you, sir."

"Show them right in," Elstin said cheerfully; of course he had expected this.

"What," asked one of the officers, "can you tell us about this affair?"

"Only what I've read in the morning newspaper," Elstin told him.

"Was Miss Caldwell going to marry you?"

"It was my hope that she would," said Elstin, giving at least one truthful answer.

"Well, there's something screwy about all this," the policeman went on. "Take them rooms. Both doors was bolted on the inside, fastened with burglar chains. Then, take that 'suicide.' The man is shot through the right temple, but now we learn he had dislocated his shoulder and couldn't even lift his right hand."

"And why," Elstin asked curiously, "do you come to me with this?"

"I'm coming to that," said the officer. "When did you see Miss Caldwell last?"

Charles Elstin was ready for that one too. "I last saw her about five days ago."

"You sure you didn't see her last night?"

Elstin picked up his coffee cup and looked steadily at the policeman. "Would you mind telling me," he asked, "just what you're driving at?"

The man spoke to his brother officer, and this second officer stepped to somebody outside; and Charles Elstin, watching, saw a girl enter the room.

She was the dark-eyed girl of the haberdashery.

"Is that the man?" the first officer asked her.

The girl looked at Elstin and nodded. "Yes," she said, "that's him all right."

The officer turned back to Elstin. "You'll have to come with us," he said, and took something from his pocket. "When this young lady sold you a pair of gloves she stuck something in between them—a sort of customer's certificate—and when we searched the dead woman's room we found it inside her window. Look!"

Charles Elstin looked—and read his doom in the slip of paper in the officer's hand.

ghosts of havana harbor

by . . . E. Phillips Oppenheim

The fate of a country hangs upon a duchess' decision to admit her forgotten indiscretion publicly.

BUTTONING UP his ulster and stretching himself to the full extent of his steamer chair, Sograngе remarked, "We may now consider ourselves at sea. I trust, my friend, that you are feeling quite comfortable."

Peter Ruff, lying at his ease upon a neighboring deck-chair, had all the appearance of being very comfortable indeed. His reply, however, was a little short. "I am comfortable enough for the present, thank you. Heaven knows how long it will last!"

Sograngе waved his arms toward the great uneasy plain of blue sea, the showers of foam leaping into the sunlight, away beyond the disappearing coast of France. "What could be more stimulating to our jaded nerves than this?"

"That is all very well," Peter protested, "but I have left several important things behind."

"As for instance?" Sograngе asked.

"My wife," Peter said. "Violet objects very much to these abrupt separations. Besides, I find it disconcerting to be called out of bed in the middle of the night to

In a period spanning the reigns of Queen Victoria to George VI, the very name of Oppenheim conveyed more glamour than any of the characters in his fiction. Here was the dream author, dashing off success after success, hobnobbing with royalty on his Riviera estate, crossing oceans as if they were narrow rivers. And here also was one of the ablest craftsmen ever to sit behind a typewriter and dash out a thrilling tale of mystery and intrigue.

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answer a long-distance telephone call, and told to embark on a ship leaving Liverpool early the next morning. It may be your idea of a pleasure trip. It isn't mine."

Peter Ruff, Baron de Grost, studied his companion, who looked the absolute picture of a sporting French marquis of healthy middle age, and considered how strangely the paths of their lives had crossed. It was difficult to realize, from surface indications, that here was one of the original members of the Double-Four, that amazing secret group who had made or augmented their fortunes through forcing the entire criminal world to pay them toll.

Peter's membership in the Double-Four was of far more recent date—like his title which had been awarded him when the society had called him out of pleasant rural retirement from his own vastly successful semi-criminal career of preying on thieves and blackguards, upon the death of the Marquise de Maupassim, founder and leader of the Double-Four.

For Peter Ruff, Baron de Grost, was the new leader of the society.

The Double-Four itself had changed, of course. No longer was its concern merely one of lining the pockets of its members through outwitting the unscrupulous. With its own importance in the shifting backstage of world affairs, the Double-Four was using its network of hidden information to bring to heel far greater criminals than any that had ever graced the dock.

Sogrange was amused. His smile, however, was hidden. Only the tip of his cigarette was visible. "Anything else?"

"Nothing much, except that I am always seasick," Peter replied deliberately. "I can feel it coming on now."

Sogrange laughed softly. "Who said anything about a pleasure trip?" he demanded.

Peter turned his head. "You did. You told me when you came on at Cherbourg that you had to go to New York to look after some property there, that things were very quiet in London, that you hated traveling alone. Therefore, you sent for me at a few hours' notice. Wasn't it true?"

"Not a word of it," Sogrange admitted. "It is amazing that you should have believed me for a moment. Lift up the label attached to the chair next to yours."

Peter took it into his hand and turned it over. A quick exclamation escaped him. "Great Heavens! The Count von Hern—Bernadine!" He sat bolt upright in his chair. "Do you mean to say that Bernadine is on board?"

Sogrange shook his head. "By the exercise, my dear Baron," he said, "of a superlative amount of ingenuity I was able to prevent that misfortune. Now lean over and read the label on the next chair."

Peter obeyed. His manner had

acquired a new briskness. "La Duchesse della Nermino," he announced.

Sogrange nodded. "Everything just as it should be," he declared. "Change those labels, my friend, as quickly as you can."

Peter's fingers were nimble and the thing was done in a few seconds. "So I am to sit next to the Spanish lady," he remarked. "Is she old or young?"

"Certainly not old. Fifteen years ago she was considered one of the most beautiful women in the world. You shall judge, my friend. Madame comes!"

An imposing little procession approached along the deck. There was the deck steward leading the way; a very smart French maid; a pallid manservant holding a hot water bottle in his hand, and finally Madame la Duchesse.

The Duchesse, save that she was tall and wrapped in magnificent furs, presented a somewhat mysterious appearance. Her features were entirely obscured by an unusually thick veil of black lace and the voluminous nature of her outer garments only permitted a suspicion as to her figure.

The deck steward, after a half-puzzled scrutiny of the labels, let down the chair next to the two men. It was at that moment that Sogrange rose to his feet.

"Would the Duchesse permit me to remind her of my existence?" he said, bowing low. "It is some years since we met but I had the honor of a dance at the Palace in Madrid."

She held out her hand at once. She spoke French with the sibilant intonation of the Spaniard. "I remember the occasion perfectly, Marquis," she admitted. "Your sister and I once shared a villa in Mentone."

"I am flattered by your recollection, Duchesse," Sogrange murmured. "Will you permit that I introduce an acquaintance? Monsieur le Baron de Grost—Madame la Duchesse della Nermino."

Peter was graciously received and the conversation dealt for a few moments with the usual banalties of the voyage. Then followed the business of settling the Duchesse in her place. When she was finally installed she raised her veil for the first time.

Peter was a little shocked by the result. Her features were worn, her face dead-white. Only her eyes had retained something of their former splendor.

In less than half an hour, however, Madame la Duchesse was looking many years younger. The vague look of apprehension had passed from her face. Their voices had sunk to a confidential undertone, punctuated often by the music of her laughter. Sogrange, with a murmured word of apology, had slipped away long ago.

Madame la Duchesse moved her head toward the empty chair. "He is a great friend of yours—the Marquis de Sogrange?" she asked with a certain inflection in

her tone which Peter was not slow to notice.

"Indeed not!" he answered. "A few years ago I was frequently in Paris. I made his acquaintance then but we have met seldom since."

"He is not a popular man in our world," she remarked. "One speaks of him as a schemer. What can a man of his type find to amuse him in America?"

"One wonders indeed," Peter assented. "As a matter of fact I did read in a newspaper a few days ago that he was going to Mexico in connection with some excavations there. They seem to have discovered a ruined temple of the Incas or something of the sort."

The Duchesse breathed what sounded very much like a sigh of relief. "I had forgotten," she admitted, "that New York itself need not necessarily be his destination."

"For my own part," Peter said, "it is quite amazing, the interest which the evening papers always take in the movements of one connected ever so slightly with their world. I think a dozen newspapers have told their readers the exact amount of money I am going to lend or borrow in New York, the mines I am going to purchase. My presence on an American steamer is accounted for by the journalists a dozen times over. Yours, Duchesse, if one might say so without appearing overcurious, seems the most inexplicable. What attraction can America possibly have for you?"

She glanced at him covertly from under her sleepy eyelids. Peter's face was like the face of a child. "You do not know, perhaps," she said, "that I was born in Cuba. I still have estates in the country."

"Indeed?" he answered. "Are you interested, then, in this reported salvage of the battleship *Maine?*"

There was a short silence. The Duchesse had all the appearance of a woman on the point of fainting, her expression one of blank terror. Peter felt a shiver chill his own blood at the things he saw in her face.

"What made you ask that question?" she demanded.

"You mean about the *Maine?* It was the idlest chance, Duchesse, I assure you. I saw something about it in the paper yesterday and it seemed interesting. But if I'd had the slightest idea that the subject was distasteful to you, I would not have dreamed of mentioning it."

"It is altogether my own fault, Baron," she admitted graciously. "Please forgive my little fit of emotion. It was very foolish. Ah! could I trouble you?" she added. "For the moment I need my maid. She passes there."

Peter sprang up and called the young woman. He himself did not return to his place. He went instead in search of Sogrange and found him in his stateroom.

"Dear Baron," Sogrange murmured, "why this haste? No one is ever in a hurry on a steamer."

Peter sat down on the edge of the bunk. "I have committed a hideous *faux pas*. You ought to have warned me. I have spoken to the Duchesse of the *Maine* disaster."

Sogrange lay perfectly still. "Why not?" he asked. "A good many people are talking about it. It is one of the strangest things I have ever heard of, that after all these years they should be trying to salvage the wreck."

Sogrange yawned and sat up. "Would you mind touching the bell for my servant, Baron," he asked. "Dinner will be served in half an hour. Afterwards we will talk, you and I."

After dinner, the two men walked on deck together. Peter knocked the ash from his cigar and was silent for a time. "My friend," he said at last, "I have come to the conclusion that you are not keeping me in ignorance of the vital facts connected with our visit to America wilfully. At the moment you know just a little more, but a very little more than I do."

"What perception!" Sogrange murmured. "My dear Baron, you are absolutely right. I have some pieces and I am convinced that they would form a puzzle the solution of which would be interesting to us, but how or where they fit in I frankly don't know. You have heard of Sirdeller?"

"You mean *the* Sirdeller?" Peter asked.

"Naturally. I mean the man whose very movements sway the money markets of the world, the man who could ruin any nation, make war impossible—who could, if he had ten more years of life, draw to himself the entire wealth of the universe."

"Very eloquent," Peter remarked. "We'll take the rest for granted."

"Then," Sogrange continued, "you have probably also heard of Don Pedro, Prince of Marsine, one time Pretender to the Throne of Spain?"

"Quite a striking figure in European politics," Peter assented quickly. "He is suspected of radical proclivities and is still, it is rumored, an active plotter against the existing monarchy."

"Very well," Sogrange said. "Now listen carefully. Four months ago Sirdeller was living at the Golden Villa near Nice. He was visited more than once by Marsine, introduced by the Count von Hern. The result of those visits was a long series of cablegrams to certain great engineering firms in America. Almost immediately the salvage of the *Maine* was started. It is a matter of common report that the entire cost of these works is being undertaken by Sirdeller.

"Now," Peter murmured, "you are really beginning to interest me."

"This week," Sogrange went

on, "it is expected that the result of the salvage works will be made known. That is to say, it is highly possible that the question of whether the *Maine* was blown up from outside or inside will be settled once and for all. Now see what happens. Sirdeller returns to America. The Duchesse della Nermino comes to America.

"The Duchesse, Sirdeller, and Marsine are on this steamer. The Count von Hern travels by the *Lusitania* only because it was reported that Sirdeller at the last minute changed his mind and was traveling by that boat. Mix these things up in your brain—the conjurer's hat, let us call it," Sograngе concluded, laying his hand upon Peter's arm, "Sirdeller, the Duchesse, Von Hern, Marsine, the raising of the *Maine*—mix them up and what sort of an omelette appears?"

Peter whistled softly. "No wonder," he said, "that you couldn't make the pieces of the puzzle fit. Tell me more about the Duchesse?"

Sograngе considered for a moment. "The principal thing about her which links her with the present situation," he explained, "is that she was living in Cuba at the time of the *Maine* disaster, married to an exceedingly rich Cuban."

The affair was suddenly illuminated by the searchlight of romance. Peter for the first time saw not the light but the possibility of it. "Marsine has been living in Germany, has he not?" he asked.

"He is a personal friend of the Kaiser," Sograngе replied.

"I expect Bernadine is a little annoyed," Peter remarked.

"It isn't pleasant to be out of the party," Sograngе agreed. "Nearly everybody, however, believed at the last moment that Sirdeller had transferred his passage to the *Lusitania*."

"It's going to cost him an awful lot in Marconigrams," Peter said. "By the bye, wouldn't it have been better for us to have traveled separately, and incognito?"

Sograngе shrugged his shoulders slightly. "Von Hern has at least one man on board," he replied. "I do not think we could possibly have escaped observation. Besides, I rather imagine that any move we are able to make in this matter must come before we reach Fire Island."

"Have you any theory at all?" Peter asked.

"Not even the ghost of one," Sograngе admitted. "One more fact, though, I forgot to mention. The Duchesse comes entirely against Von Hern's wishes. They have been on intimate terms for years but for some reason he was exceedingly anxious that she should not take this voyage. She, on the other hand, seemed to have some equally strong reason for coming. The most useful piece of advice I could give you would be to cultivate her acquaintance."

"The Duchesse—" Peter never

finished his sentence. His companion drew him suddenly back into the shadow of a lifeboat.

A door had opened from lower down the deck, and a curious little procession was coming toward them. A man, burly and broad-shouldered, walked by himself ahead. Two others of similar build walked a few steps behind. And between them a thin insignificant figure, wrapped in an immense fur coat and using a strong walking stick, came slowly along the deck.

It was like a procession of prison wardens guarding a murderer or perhaps a nerve-racked royal personage moving toward the end of his days in the midst of enemies. With halting steps the little man came shambling along. His eyes were fixed and yet unseeing, his features were pale and bony. There was no gleam of life, not even in the stone-cold eyes.

"There goes Sirdeller," Sograngе whispered. "Look at him—the man whose might is greater than any emperor's."

Peter shivered. There was something depressing in the sight of that mournful procession.

"He neither smokes nor drinks," Sograngе continued. "Women as a sex do not exist for him. He has a doctor and a clergyman always by his side to inject life and hope if they can. Look at him well, my friend. He represents a great moral lesson."

"Thanks!" Peter replied. "I'm going to take the taste of him out of my mouth with a whiskey and soda. Afterwards I'm for the Duchesse."

But the Duchesse apparently was not for Peter. He found her in the music room with several of the little Marconi missives spread out before her, and she cut him dead. Peter, however, was a brave man, so he stopped by her side.

"Duchesse," he said, "you are a woman of perceptions. Which do you believe, then, in your heart to be the more trustworthy—the Count von Hern or I?"

She simply stared at him. He continued promptly, "You have received your warning from the Count von Hern. Why believe what he says? He may be a friend of yours but you know that he is both unscrupulous and selfish. Why accept his word and distrust me? I, at least, am honest."

She raised her eyebrows. "Honest?" she repeated. "Whose word have I for that save your own?"

"My friend Sograngе will tell you that I am to be trusted," Peter persisted.

"I see no reason why I should trouble myself about your personal characteristics," she replied coldly. "They do not interest me."

"On the contrary, Duchesse," Peter continued, fencing wildly, "you have never in your life been more in need of anyone's services than you are of mine."

The conflict was uneven. The Duchesse was a nervous, highly

strung woman. The calm assurance of Peter's manner oppressed her with a sense of his mastery.

"I wish you would tell me what you mean," she said. "What have you to do with my private affairs?"

"You have no private affairs," Peter declared sternly. "They are the affairs of a nation."

She glanced at him with a little shiver. "How much do you know?" she asked in a low tone which shook with passion.

Peter smiled enigmatically. "Perhaps even more than you, Duchesse," he replied. "I should like to be your friend. You need one."

She rose abruptly to her feet. "For tonight it is enough," she declared, wrapping her fur cloak around her. "You may talk to me tomorrow, Baron. If you really desire to be my friend there is perhaps one service which I may require of you."

Peter stood aside and allowed her to step past him. She had left several copies of the New York *Herald*. He took them up and read them carefully through. The last one he found particularly interesting, so much so that he folded it up, placed it in his coat pocket, and went off to look for Sogrange, whom he found at last in the saloon. Peter sank upon the cushioned seat by his side.

"You were right," he said. "Bernadine has been busy."

Sogrange smiled. "I trust," he said, "that the Duchesse is not proving faithless?"

"So far," Peter replied, "I have kept my end up. Tomorrow will be the test. She thinks I know everything—whatever everything may be. Unless I can discover a little more than I do now, tomorrow is going to be an exceedingly awkward day for me."

"There is every prospect of your acquiring a great deal of valuable information before then," Sogrange declared. "Sit tight, my friend. Something is going to happen."

On the threshold of the saloon, ushered in by one of the stewards, a tall, powerful-looking man, with a square well-trimmed black beard, was standing looking around as though in search of someone. The steward pointed out, with an unmistakable movement of his head, Peter and Sogrange. The man approached and took the next table.

"Steward," he directed, "bring me a glass of vermouth and some dominoes."

Peter's eyes were suddenly bright. Sogrange touched his foot under the table and whispered a word of warning. The dominoes were brought. The newcomer arranged them as though for a game. Then he calmly withdrew the double-four and laid it before Sogrange. "It has been my misfortune, Marquis," he said, "never to have made your acquaintance, although I think I have the right to claim a certain amount of consideration from you and your associates. You know me?"

"Certainly, Prince," Sograngе replied. "I am charmed. Permit me to present my friend, the Baron de Grost."

The newcomer bowed and glanced a little nervously around. "You will permit me," he begged. "I travel incognito. I have lived so long in England that I have permitted myself the name of an Englishman. I am traveling under the name of James Fanshawe."

"Mr. Fanshawe, by all means," Sograngе agreed. "In the meantime—"

"I claim my rights as a corresponding member of the Double-Four," the newcomer declared. "My friend the Count von Hern finds menace to certain plans of ours in your presence upon this steamer. Unknown to him I come to you openly. I claim your aid, not your enmity."

"Let us understand one another clearly," Sograngе said. "You claim our aid in what?"

Mr. Fanshawe glanced around the saloon and lowered his voice. "I claim your aid toward the overthrowing of the usurping House of Brangaza and the restoration to power in Spain of my own line."

Sograngе was silent for several moments. Peter was leaning forward in his place, deeply interested.

"Our active aid toward such an end," Sograngе said at last, "is impossible. The Society of the Double-Four does not interfere in the domestic policy of other nations for the sake of individual members."

"Then let me ask you why I find you upon this steamer?" Mr. Fanshawe demanded in a tone of suppressed excitement. "Is it for the sea voyage that you and the Baron de Grost cross the Atlantic this particular week, on the same steamer as myself, as Mr. Sirdeller and—and the Duchesse? One is driven to conclude that it is your intention to interfere."

"The affair almost demands our interference," Sograngе replied smoothly. "With every due respect to you, Prince, there are great interests involved in this move of yours."

The Prince controlled himself with an effort. "Marquis," he said, "this is necessary—I say that it is necessary that we conclude an alliance."

Sograngе nodded approvingly. "It is well spoken," he said, "but remember—the Baron de Grost represents the English interests of our Society."

The Prince of Marsine's face was not pleasant to look upon. "Forgive me if you are an Englishman by birth, Baron," he said, turning toward him, "but a more interfering nation in other people's affairs than England has never existed. She must have a finger in every pie."

Peter leaned over from his place. "What about Germany—Mr. Fanshawe?"

The Prince tugged at his beard. He was a little nonplussed. "The

Count von Hern," he confessed, "has been a good friend to me. The rulers of his country have always been hospitable and favorably inclined toward my family. The whole affair is of his design. I myself could scarcely have moved in it alone. One must reward one's helpers. There is no reason, however," he added, with a meaning glance at Peter, "why other helpers should not be admitted."

"The reward which you offer to the Count von Hern," Peter remarked, "is of itself absolutely inimical to the interests of my country."

"Listen!" the Prince demanded, tapping the table before him. "It is true that within a year I am pledged to reward the Count von Hern in certain fashion. It is not possible that you know the terms of our compact but from your words it is possible that you have guessed. Very well. Accept this from me. Remain neutral now, let your government address representations to me when the time comes, and I promise that I will obey them. It will not be my fault that I am compelled to disappoint the Count von Hern. My seaboard would be at the mercy of your fleet. Superior force must be obeyed."

"It is a matter," Sogrange said, "for discussion between my friend and me. I think that you will find that we are neither of us unreasonable."

"You encourage me," the Prince declared in a gratified voice. "Do not believe, Marquis, that I am actuated in this matter wholly by motives of personal ambition. I assure you that of my certain knowledge Spain is honeycombed —is rotten with treason. A revolution is a certainty.

"How much better that that revolution should be conducted in a dignified manner—that I, with my reputation for democracy, should be elected President of the new Spanish Republic even if it is the gold of the American which places me there. In a year or two who can say what may happen? This craving for a republic is but a passing dream. Spain is monarchical at heart. She will be led back to the light. It is but a short step from the president's chair to the throne. There is one thing more," the Prince continued, dropping his voice as if he feared the man of whom he spoke.

"I shall not inform the Count von Hern of our conversation. He sends me message after message that I remain in my stateroom, that I seek no interview with Sirdeller, that I watch only. He does not understand that code of honor, relying upon which I open my heart to you."

"You have done your cause no harm," Sogrange assured him with subtle sarcasm. "We come now to the Duchesse."

The Prince leaned toward him. It was just at this moment that a steward entered with a Marconigram, which he presented to the

Prince. The latter tore it open, glanced it through, and gave vent to a little exclamation.

"My friends," he cried in a tone broken with emotion, "it is you first who shall hear the news! The *Maine* was sunk by a torpedo discharged at close quarters underneath her magazine. Gentlemen, the House of Brangaza is ruined!"

There was a breathless silence.

"Your information is genuine?" Sogrange asked softly.

"Without a doubt," the Prince replied. "I have been expecting this message. I shall cable to Von Hern. He may not have heard."

"We were about to speak of the Duchesse," Peter reminded him.

The Prince shook his head. "Another time," he declared. "Another time."

He hurried away. It was already half-past ten and the saloon was almost empty.

"Let us go on deck," Peter suggested.

They found their way up to the windward side of the promenade, which was absolutely deserted. The wind roared by as the great steamer rose and fell on the black stretch of waters. Peter stood very near to his companion.

"Listen, Sogrange," he said, "the affair is clear now save for one thing."

"You mean Sirdeller's motives?"

"Not at all," Peter answered. "An hour ago I came across the explanation of these. That I will tell you afterwards. Now listen. Sirdeller came abroad last year for twelve months' travel. He took a great house in San Sebastian."

"Where did you hear this?" Sogrange asked.

"I read the story in the New York *Herald,*" Peter continued. "Sirdeller and his suite were stopped on the Spanish frontier and treated in an abominable fashion by the customs officers. He was forced to pay a very large sum, unjustly I should think. He paid under protest.

"At San Sebastian he was robbed right and left, his privacy intruded upon. In short, he took a violent hatred to the country and everyone concerned in it. He moved with his entire suite to Nice, to the Golden Villa. There he expressed himself freely concerning Spain and her government. Count von Hern heard of it and presented Marsine. The plot was without doubt Bernadine's.

"Can't you imagine how he would put it? 'A revolution,' he would tell Sirdeller, 'is imminent in Spain. Here is the new President of the Republic. Money is no more to you than water. You are a patriotic American. Have you forgotten that a warship of your country with six hundred of her devoted citizens was sent to the bottom by the treachery of one of this effete race? The war was an inefficient revenge. The country still flourishes. It is for you to avenge America. With

money Marsine can establish a republic in Spain within twenty-four hours.'

"Sirdeller hesitates. He would point out that it had never been proved that the destruction of the *Maine* was really due to Spanish treachery. It is the idea of a business man which followed. He, at his own expense, would raise the *Maine*. If it were true that the explosion occurred from outside he would find the money. You see, the message has arrived. After all these years the sea has given up its secret. Marsine will return to Spain with an unlimited credit behind him. The House of Brangaza will crumble like a pack of cards."

Sograngе looked out into the darkness. Perhaps, for a moment, he saw the panorama of a city in flames, the passing of a great country under the thrall of these new ideas. At any rate he turned abruptly and, taking Peter's arm, walked slowly down the deck.

"You have solved the puzzle, Baron," he said gravely. "Now tell me the one thing. Your story seems to dovetail everywhere."

"The one thing," Peter said, "is connected with the Duchesse. It was she, of her own will who decided to come to America. I believe that, but for her coming, Bernadine and the Prince would have waited in their own country. Money can flash from America to England over the wires. It does not need to be fetched. They have still one fear. It is connected with the Duchesse. Let me think."

They walked up and down the deck. The lights were extinguished one by one except in the smoking-room. The wind changed its quarter and the great ship began to roll. Peter stopped abruptly.

"I am going to bed," he said. "Tonight I cannot think. Tomorrow, I promise you, we will solve this!"

In many respects the room resembled a miniature court of justice. The principal sitting room of the royal suite, which was the chief glory of the Adriatic, had been stripped of every superfluous article of furniture or embellishment. Curtains had been removed, all evidences of luxury disposed of. Temporarily the apartment had been transformed into a bare cheerless place.

Seated on a high chair, with his back to the wall, was Sirdeller. At his right hand was a small table on which stood a glass of milk, a phial, a stethoscope. Behind, his doctor. At his left hand a smooth-faced, silent young man—his secretary. Before him stood the Duchesse, Peter Ruff and Sograngе. Guarding the door was one of the watchmen.

Sirdeller himself, in the clear light which streamed through the large window, seemed more aged and shrunken than ever. He wore a black velvet gown, a strangely cut black morning coat and trousers, felt slippers, and his

hands were clasped upon a stout ash walking stick. He eyed the newcomers keenly but without expression.

"I will hear this story," he announced. "In two minutes everyone must leave. If it takes longer it must remain unfinished."

Peter spoke up briskly. "The story is this," he began. "You have promised to assist the Prince of Marsine to transform Spain into a Republic, providing the salvage operations on the *Maine* prove that the ship was destroyed from outside. The salvage operations have been conducted at your expense and finished. It has been proved that the *Maine* was destroyed by a mine or torpedo from the outside.

"Therefore, on the assumption that it was the treacherous deed of a spaniard or Cuban imagining himself to be a patriot, you are prepared to carry out your undertaking and supply the Prince of Marsine with means to overthrow the Kingdom of Spain."

Peter paused. The figure on the chair remained motionless. No flicker of intelligence or interest disturbed the calm of his features. It was a silence almost unnatural.

"I have brought the Duchesse here," Peter continued, "to tell you the truth as to the *Maine* disaster."

Not even then was there the slightest alteration in those ashen grey features. The Duchesse looked up. She had the air of one only too eager to speak and finish.

"In those days," she said, "I was the wife of a rich Cuban gentleman, whose name I withhold. The American officers on board the *Maine* used to visit at our house. My husband was jealous; perhaps he had cause."

The Duchesse paused. Even though the light of tragedy and romance side by side seemed suddenly to creep into the room, Sirdeller listened as one come back from a dead world.

"One night," the Duchesse went on, "my husband's suspicions were changed into knowledge. He came home unexpectedly. The American—the officer—I loved him—he was there on the balcony with me. My husband said nothing. The officer returned to the ship. That night my husband came into my room. He bent over my bed. 'It is not you,' he whispered, 'whom I shall destroy for the pain of death is short. Anguish of mind may live. Tonight six hundred ghosts may hang about your pillow.' "

Her voice broke. There was something grim and unnatural in that curious stillness. Even the secretary was at last breathing a little faster. Sirdeller simply moved his hand to the doctor, who held up his finger while he felt the pulse.

In a minute he spoke. "The lady may proceed," he said.

"My husband," the Duchesse continued, "was an officer in

charge of the Mines and Ordnance Department. He went out that night in a small boat, after a visit to the strong-house. No soul has ever seen or heard of him since, or his boat."

Her voice died away. Sirdeller stretched out his hand and drank a tablespoonful or two of his milk.

"I believe the lady's story," he declared. "The Marsine affair is finished. Let no one be admitted to have speech with me again upon this subject, at any time."

Sirdeller half-turned toward his secretary. The young man bowed. The doctor pointed toward the door. The Duchesse, Peter and Sogrange filed slowly out. In the bright sunlight the Duchesse burst into a peal of hysterical laughter. Even Peter felt unnerved for a moment. Suddenly he too laughed.

"I think," he said, "that you and I had better get out of the way, Sogrange, when the Count von Hern meets us at New York!"

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he sat down to wait

by . . . August Derleth

There was a mass murderer loose and poor Jackson's host seemed to know a goodly deal about him.

ELIPHAS JACKSON could have been summed up in a few words—middle-aged, timid, going bald. He wore glasses over mild watery blue eyes and had blond hair around his bald spot. He dressed neatly, whether following his profession or not, and was surprised when people took an interest in him. But he appreciated it very much. He did not have much companionship and was always somewhat lonely.

So when the elderly traveler, who had come to the hotel only a little while after himself, invited him to his room for a talk, he accepted readily enough and eyed his acquaintance anew—a bluff red-faced man with twinkling eyes and greying mustache. There was nothing distinctive about him.

Jackson was talked at effusively, waved expansively to a chair and had the slightly disagreeable sensation of having a newspaper fanned under his nose.

"Murch is the name, sir," his red-faced host said jovially. "Just plain Murch. It's not much of a name but it'll do."

Jackson smiled. "It's not as common as Jackson," he said almost apologetically.

"Perhaps not," conceded

Six people had been killed—poisoned—under mysterious circumstances, and the police didn't have a single clue. Murch knew exactly how they had been committed—but why was he telling his theory to Jackson, a perfect stranger?

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Murch. "But I don't know that I'd a lot rather have a common name like that. It's a good sound name, whatever you say."

He bustled about and got out a siphon and some glasses, explaining that he had been experimenting with some Sauterne—"Gassing it a bit," he said but it tasted good enough. Of course, if Jackson were a connoisseur or something like that, he wouldn't care for it.

Jackson tried it gingerly and admitted that it was good.

Murch settled himself into a chair which fitted him too snugly and waved the paper at him again. "Been reading about these queer murders," he said. "Awful stuff, I call it."

"You mean those people dying in the small towns around here?" Jackson asked.

Murch nodded. "One in almost every town so far, right up the line to here. Seems to be working along this route and it wouldn't surprise me if one hit this town too—but I hope not until I get out of it." He giggled.

Jackson reflected briefly that he had a vaguely disgusting giggle.

Murch leaned confidentially over the table. "You know, Jackson, I've got a theory about those crimes," he said. "I'll bet I could tell you just how they were done."

Jackson looked polite. "Could you?" he asked.

"I could," affirmed Murch gravely.

"The papers said the police didn't have any clues."

"Well, it's true they hadn't much to go on. Take that first murder now—an old woman. Like a bolt out of the blue, it was. She had no relatives, no money to leave, nothing. There was absolutely no motive. Nothing to be gained by her death. I can well imagine the police were baffled on that one especially. It was the lack of motive—that always gets them, you know.

"They go looking for it right off and when they can't find it, most of the time they're lost right at the start. At that I don't know that the second didn't puzzle them still more. Young man that time, remember? They couldn't find a shred of motive for his murder either. And no connection among the six who died."

"Have they found a motive in any?" inquired Jackson.

"Not one," replied Murch proudly and then leaned forward again to add, "But *I* have. I've found a motive for every one of them!"

Jackson looked at him a little more closely. The twinkling quality seemed to have left Murch's eyes and they were now hard and glittering. A breath of uneasiness fanned up in Jackson.

"Really," he said.

"I have," repeated Murch.

Jackson waited.

"Going around the way I do," continued Murch, "I found out that every town where a murder was committed was visited by a medicine show. A one-man show

on a one-night stand. The fellow sold some kind of laxative pills by the box—cheap too. Well, sir, in one of those boxes in each town that man put a poison pill.

"Cyanide—that's what the autopsies showed on these bodies, remember? He didn't know who'd get that poison pill—and he didn't care. He'd be safely out of there before anything happened and in that way no one would ever suspect because he never sold more than one poison pill in a town."

"There's no sense to it," protested Jackson.

"Of course not," agreed Murch instantly. "But that's the way it was done. I'll bet the police have been making inquiries and traced some of the cyanide. Fellow wasn't shrewd enough—they'll find him, they'll find him all right, you mark my words!"

"They will?"

"They most certainly will. It's only a matter of time. But I'll bet they won't guess at the motive until the last—and then if they'll look up that fellow's ancestry they'll find proof and trace of it." He leaned over and tapped Jackson's knee, and his voice dropped to a harsh whisper. "You see, the fellow's a murderer of the worst kind and it's very likely he doesn't know it."

Jackson was fascinated against his will. He stared at the remarkable glow of his companion's eyes until he felt his mouth go dry. Unaccountably he felt himself loathing this sinister fellow-traveler and wanting desperately to escape. But he did not move.

He licked his lips tentatively and asked in a whisper as low as Murch's, "How so? How so he doesn't know it?"

"It's the motive," said Murch triumphantly. "That's the secret!"

"And what—what is the motive?"

"I'll tell you how I've got it figured out. The man's a homicidal maniac, that's what. Every little while he has to kill someone. It's a strange kind of mania—he might know what's the matter with him or he might not.

"It works like this—a sort of spell comes over him. He becomes someone else for that time and he has to kill someone. Do you understand that, Jackson? He simply must kill someone.

"Most of the time when they're like that they get violent. They take up a knife or pistol and go after the first person they see. But sometimes it's different—sometimes they work secretly. Like this man now, this fellow who's done all these murders and got away with it. Take him now—can you guess what happens to him?"

Jackson shook his head mutely, his eyes almost afraid to leave Murch's face. He saw that his companion was perspiring.

"Well, he gets a spell like that and he likely gets it when he's making his pills. He makes one pill up with deadly poison in it,

only one. And he puts it in one of the boxes to be sold in the next town—or if he makes them up for several towns he puts one poison pill in each batch.

"If he expects to sell twenty boxes he puts a pill in one of them. That's the way he does it. Once he's done that he'll be satisfied. He doesn't know who'll get that pill but he knows somebody will die by his hand. And very likely, once it's done, he forgets all about it.

"He comes out of his spell and he never knows what's happened. He sees his pills done but he doesn't know that somewhere among those boxes are scattered deadly poison pills. He's had his spell, you see, and like as not he's imagined all the suffering and agony those poor people are going through before they die. But after he's done the pills he forgets—he's as sane as you and me."

The theory held Jackson almost as strongly as Murch's hypnotic eyes. His uneasiness had congealed into terror but no sign of it passed his lips.

"If he doesn't know it," he began, "how can they prove it to him? What can they do to him?"

"They'll lock him up in an asylum. It'll be hell on him, being sane most of the time, same as you and I, but it's the only thing to do."

Jackson caught what seemed to him a rising light in Murch's eyes. Murch was looking at him so strangely that his uneasiness and terror thrust sharply up within him and he got up suddenly, mumbling that he had to go to his own room, that he had some letters to answer.

Murch waved the paper after him jovially enough but made no move to stop him.

Once in his own room again, Jackson shuddered. He sat down as if still under the influence of Murch's baleful eyes and picked up a letter he had already read once that day—from the board chairman of the next village.

> *Dear Mr. Jackson:*
> *We enclose herewith our permit as per your payment of the seventeenth for a one-night stand of your medicine show in our village on the night of the twenty-third . . .*

What was it Murch had said? *Homicidal mania.*

He got up quite calmly and drew himself a glass of water. Then he brought his stack of pills to the table and began methodically going over them, going over the small boxes one by one.

In the seventh one he found a pill somewhat different from the others—a little darker where the sugar coating had begun to crack and peel slightly.

He looked at it, took it out, held it in his palm. Then he pushed the box away, got up and pulled over the glass of water.

He took the pill and sat down to wait.

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2 The Case of the MOTH-EATEN MINK

Mason rushes to a hotel and finds the girl the police are looking for. "The man in room 851," she sobs, "wants to KILL me!" Just then the police burst into the room. "Don't move!" they order. "A man has been killed in room 851 — *you're both wanted for MURDER!*"

3 The Case of the ONE-EYED WITNESS

Mason picks up the phone. A voice says: "See Carlin tonight. Tell him to get another partner. *Matter of life and death!*" But Carlin never HAD a partner! Yet he's MURDERED!

4 The Case of the ANGRY MOURNER

Belle Adrain, Mason's client, is pale as a ghost. A witness SWEARS he saw her at the scene of the murder. And Exhibit "A" — the *murder* weapon — is Belle's OWN GUN!

5 The Case of the NEGLIGENT NYMPH

Mason sees a girl escaping from George Alder's estate. She hands him a letter. "Alder will do ANYTHING to get this letter!" she says. "You *must* stop him!" But someone else beats Mason to it — *by killing Alder!*

6 The Case of the FIERY FINGERS

Perry's client is on trial for murder. The D.A. flings a package in front of the accused woman. She collapses. The jury is ready to send her to the chair — but Perry comes up with a surprise package of his own!

— Continued on inside cover

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